

Extended distribution of a recently described dipsadine colubrid snake: *Atractus gigas*

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Abstract. We report a geographic range extension for *Atractus gigas* (colubridae) based on a live specimen found in primary Andean cloud-forest (Bosque Protector Santa Lucía, Pichincha, Ecuador). The specimen represents only the second known record of this species, and the sole live record, discovered 48 km northeast of the type location, and 407 m higher; at an altitude of 2307 m.a.s.l. The specimen agrees with the holotypic head scutellation, with the exception of lacking the azygous frontonasal scale reported in the holotype. We suggest that the holotypic head scalation is aberrant and that the specimen documented here exhibits the typical condition in this species.

Resumen. Reportamos una extensión de distribución de la serpiente *Atractus gigas* (colubridae) basada en un animal vivo que observamos en bosque primario nuboso Andino (Bosque Protector Santa Lucía, Pichincha, Ecuador). Ese espécimen representa sólo el segundo registro de la especie, extendiendo la distribución conocida 48 km hacia el noreste, y 407 m más alta; a la altitud de 2307 m.s.n.m. La escamación del espécimen concuerda con el holotipo, salvo que no tiene la escama frontonasal media del holotipo. Sugerimos que el holotipo muestra escamación aberrante y que nuestro espécimen representa la condición normal para esa especie.

Keywords. *Atractus gigas*, range extension, Andes, endemic.

The New World genus *Atractus* is highly diverse, comprising more than 100 species of fossorial or cryptozoic snakes distributed from Panamá to Northern Argentina (Myers, 2003; Passos, Fernandes and Zanella, 2005). *Atractus gigas* (Myers and Schargel, 2006) is distinguished from congeners by its large size (>1m) and robust shape.

Prior to the discovery of the specimen reported here,

Atractus gigas was known only from a single, female individual, at the type locality of Bosque Protector Río Guajalito, Pichincha, Ecuador (00° 14'S, 78° 49'W) (Myers and Schargel, 2006). While conducting field research in the Ecuadorian Andes on 6 July 2009, we encountered a live specimen crossing a path at an altitude of 2307 m a.s.l. in primary cloud-forest, Bosque Protector Santa Lucía, Pichincha, Ecuador (00.11429° N, 078.57075°W; WGS 84). This record extends the range of *A. gigas* approximately 48 km northeast of the holotype. A photographic voucher has been assigned by the University of Texas at Arlington (UTADC 4021-4028).

Bosque Protector Santa Lucía lies within the southern section of the developing Chocó-Andean conservation corridor, on the Pacific versant of the Ecuadorean Andes. The reserve comprises 730 ha, of which 80% is primary cloudforest, characterized by high plant diversity, low relative tree density, and indicator species belonging to the families Clusiaceae, Lauraceae (laurels) and Myrtaceae (myrtles) (Earthwatch field report, 2008).

The specimen exhibited typical colubrid head scalation (Fig. 1), lacking the azygous diamond-shaped scale

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Figure 1. Adult *Atractus gigas* (UTADC 4021-4028) showing smooth dorsal scales and typical colubrid head scutellation.

situated between inter-nasal and pre-frontal sutures in the holotype (Myers and Schargel, 2006). Total length was 1100mm (60mm longer than the holotype) and snout-vent length 1000mm, giving a tail length of 9.1% of the total (11.9% in the holotype). The smooth dorsal

scales totaled 17 at mid-body, the subcaudals were divided and the anal plate undivided. We were unable to verify the sex of the specimen. Dorsal colouration was chocolate-brown with pale gray transverse bands (Fig. 1 and 2), and ventral scales were reddish-brown (Fig.3).



Figure 2. Adult *Atractus gigas* (UTADC 4021- 4028) showing divided subcaudal scales and iridescent colouration.



Figure 3. First author holding the specimen of adult *Atractus gigas* (UTADC 4021- 4028) showing large size, robust shape and reddish-brown venter.

An iridescent dorsal sheen was visible in the sunlight (Figures 1, 2 and 3). Holotype colouration in life was unknown, but in preservative corresponds well with the specimen described here.

We suggest that the holotype displays aberrant head scutellation, and that the scalation of the specimen reported here is the norm for this species, being consistent with the typical condition for the genus *Atractus* and the family Colubridae.

Little is known about the ecology or behaviour of this species. The specimen was docile and easily handled. It defaecated during a day spent in captivity, producing faeces that appeared to contain small mammal remains. However, no formal dietary analysis was conducted.

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