

On the presence of *Scincopus fasciatus* (Squamata, Scincidae) in Mauritania

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RESUMEN: *Scincopus fasciatus* es un reptil distribuido por la región sureña del Sahara y el Sahel. Debido a su naturaleza elusiva, los registros de esta especie son raros y dispersos. En esta nota, aportamos la observación de un espécimen adulto en Mauritania (el quinto registro del país). Más observaciones ayudarían a evaluar, entre otros aspectos, el estado de conservación de esta especie.

Scincopus fasciatus (Peters, 1864) is one of the rarest skink species from Northwest Africa. It was described by Peters as *Scincus* (*Scincopus*) *fasciatus* (Peters, 1864), based on a specimen from Geryville, Algeria (Sindaco, 1995). Posteriorly, Doumergue (1901) elevated *Scincopus* to generic status and this has been considered a monospecific genus since then. Phylogenetic relationships based on molecular data (Carranza *et al.*, 2008; Pyron *et al.*, 2013) suggest a close relationship between *S. fasciatus* and *Eumeces algeriensis*. This latter taxon appears not closely related to *E. schneideri*, rendering North African *Eumeces* polyphyletic.

Two subspecies have been described within *S. fasciatus*: *S. f. fasciatus* (Peters, 1864), widely distributed throughout the southern region of the Sahara along the Sahel ecoregions, with dispersed populations in Northwestern Africa and *S. f. melanocephalus* (Lanza & Corsi, 1981) described from a single population located at the east side of the Nile river in Suakin, Northeast of Sudan (Lanza & Corsi, 1981). The western range of the species (Morocco and Mauritania) is formed by dispersed and isolated records. Its occurrence

in Morocco has been reported by a single specimen from Merzouga in 1970, where it has not been observed since then (Bons & Geniez, 1996). Also, its presence in Mauritania was scarcely reported, with one published record at N^oTerquent in Adrar province, near Atar, but without

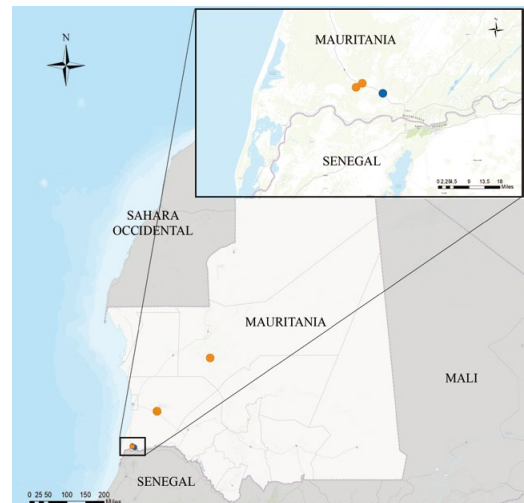


Figure 1: Distribution map of *S. fasciatus fasciatus* in Mauritania. Orange dots: literature records. Blue dot: present record.

Figura 1: Mapa de distribución de *S. fasciatus fasciatus* en Mauritania. Puntos naranja: registros bibliográficos. Punto azul: registro presente.



Figure 2: Habitat of *S. fasciatus fasciatus*.
Figura 2: Hábitat de *S. fasciatus fasciatus*.

precise source (Geniez *et al.*, 2004), and three in Trarza province: La' Bâra (Le Berre, 1989), 30 km North West of Rosso (Böhme *et al.*, 2001), and Lahouich (Trape *et al.*, 2012; J.C. Brito, personal communication). *Scincopus* spp. has been reported from several types of habitats dominated by arid and semi-arid climate in North Africa, from sandy regions to areas of savannah (Geniez *et al.*, 2010; Trape *et al.*, 2012).

During a field survey carried out across West Africa, on 21 September 2015 an adult of *S. f. fasciatus* was observed in Southwestern Mauritania, around El Haédi, North-West Rosso, at 12 masl, coordinates: 16°36'23.53" N, 15°53'51.34" W (Figure 1). The habitat, placed in the Sahelian Acacia Savannah bioregion (Burguess *et al.*, 2004), was dominated by dispersed acacias, shrubs, with the sandy loose soil covered by extensive grassland (Figure 2). This area is characterized by arid and strongly seasonal climatic conditions, with a maximum temperature of 33-36°C and a minimum of 18-21°C. It also has an annual mean precipitation of 600 mm (Burguess *et al.*, 2004). The specimen was found active, crawling on the grass during the night with 28°C of air temperature. It exhibited the typical coloration pattern of the nominal subspecies.

Snout-vent length was around 25 cm and the tail was regenerated (Figure 3).

This record, the fifth for the country based on published records, is placed near to Diawling National Park, but it was not detected during a recent field survey across this region (Sow *et al.*, 2017). Like others skink species (e.g., *Scincus albifasciatus*), *S. fasciatus* has secretive habits and is difficult to detect, and probably the scattered nature of their records is due to this. On the other hand, this record, close to Senegal border, suggests that its presence in this country could be highly probable, as the habitat of northern Senegal is formed by a similar Sahelian habitat and several common distributed taxa of skinks and other reptiles are known to occur in both countries (e.g. *Chalcides delislei*, *Chalcides sphenopsiformis*, *Scincus albifasciatus*, *Tropicolotes tripolitanus*, *Stenodactylus petrii*, *Acanthodactylus senegalensis*; Trape *et al.*, 2012).

The lack of biological data for *Scincopus* sp. from the western range of its distribution makes it the target to develop future expeditions, aimed at increasing the knowledge on the biology, ecology and conservation status of this enigmatic species, currently catalogued as "Insufficient data" in the IUCN Red List (Geniez *et al.*, 2010).



Figure 3: Specimen of *S. fasciatus fasciatus*.
Figura 3: Ejemplar de *S. fasciatus fasciatus*.

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