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NEW RECORD OF PLATEAU SNAKE SKINK, *Ophiomorus nuchalis* (SQUAMATA: SCINCIDAE), FROM IRAN

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Four specimens of *Ophiomorus nuchalis* (Plateau Snake Skink) were collected from the northern edge of Kavir Protected Region on April 25, 2009, this is the 4th record for this skink from Iran and the first record from some place other than the type locality. The habitat of this skink in this locality is totally different from its habitat in the type locality. Information on habitat, color pattern, size, diet and sexual dimorphism is given.

Keywords. Habitat, Iran, Kavir, *Ophiomorus nuchalis*, Plateau Snake Skink

INTRODUCTION

The Plateau Snake Skink (*Ophiomorus nuchalis*) is a rare lizard in Iran and there have been only three prior published records. The first record is that of Nilson and Andrén (1978) who described this skink as a new species based on 2 specimens collected from 34°44′ N 52°11′ E at the northern slopes of Siah-Kuh, near Cheshmeh-Shah, Kavir National Park, Iran (Fig. 1). Two additional specimens were found, one in 1999 and one in 2000 by the senior author at the type locality (Mozaffari, 2007). Recently, during one of Pars Herpetologists Institute fieldworks in 2009, another population of this skink was found.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Four specimens, 1 male (PHIM00078) 3 females, (PHIM00076, PHIM77 and PHIM79) were collected from 35°6′42.1″ N 51°46′14.5″ E at 807 m a.s.l., about 5 km north of Kavir Protected Region entrance on April 25, 2009.

RESULTS

General description. Body elongate, cylindrical and serpentine, snout conical, eyes small with movable eyelid, lower eyelid with a large transparent scale, ear opening absent, Limbs greatly reduced, forelimbs with 4 and hindlimbs with 3 digits without fringes, mouth opening located on the ventral side of head.

Size. PHIM00076: SVL 113 mm. PHIM00077: SVL 110 mm. Both have regenerated tails. PHIM00078: SVL 95 mm, Tail: 107 mm. PHIM00079: SVL 103 mm, Tail: 105 mm.

Coloration and color patterns. Dorsal cream or pale brown in life, each scale of the two median dorsal rows with a black spot, forming 2 longitudinal black lines on the body and tail, 3 next rows of scales on each side of these lines unicolor with scattered black spots (but in one specimen almost all of those scales have dark spots (Fig. 2**B**), next 3 lateral rows with a black spot, forming 3 longitudinal black lines along the body, meeting together at the forelimb forming dark stripe that crosses through the eye and reaches to nostril, also meeting together at the hindlimb region and dividing into two black lines along the tail (Fig. 2**A**), all scales on regenerated parts of the tail have some black pattern (Fig. 2**C**), belly pale pink or white, dorsal side of head with dark pattern. no sexual dimorphism in coloration was observed.

Pholidosis. Number of longitudinal scale rows around middle of body: 22 (no sexual dimorphism in number of longitudinal scale rows observed); nostril surrounded by 2 nasals; number of scales between nasal and eye: 2; upper labials 7/7; lower labials 6/6.

Diet. Coleoptera (Carabeidae, Curculionidae and Tenebrionidae), Neuroptera (ant lion) larva, and Orthoptera (Gryllidae) were found in their feces.

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Habitat. According to Nilson and Andrén (1978), the type specimens of *O. nuchalis* were collected under stones on almost bare gravel ground with sparse and patchy vegetation and without loose sand but we found them in a totally different habitat. Four specimens were collected from a locality at the bank of a dry river with clay topsoil. Dominant habitat vegetation contained *Tamarix*, *Prosopis*, *Alhagi*, and *Artemisia*. There was a thin (less than 10 cm) loose soil layer mixed with plant detritus at the base of bushes. Under this layer there was a sticky, wet clay soil. Three specimens were collected in the top layers by using a small rake and one found by sound of its motion near the base of the bush (Fig. 3).

The other reptile species that were find in this habitat were *Trapelus agilis*, *Eremias persica*, *Eremias velox*

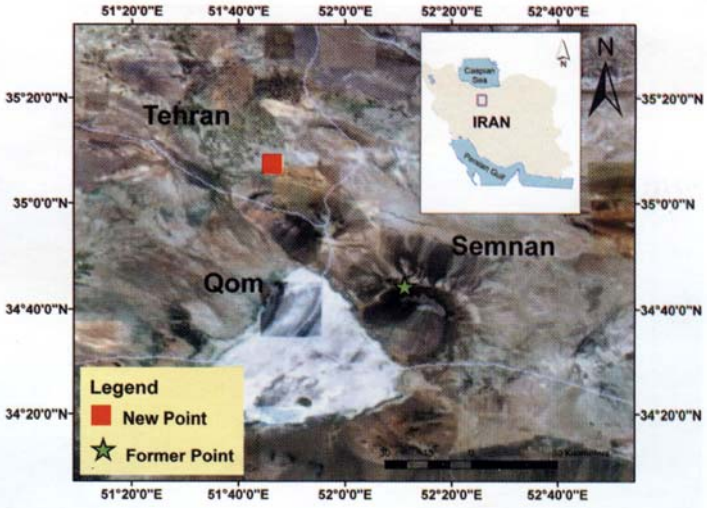

Fig. 1. Distribution of *Ophiomorus nuchalis* in Iran.

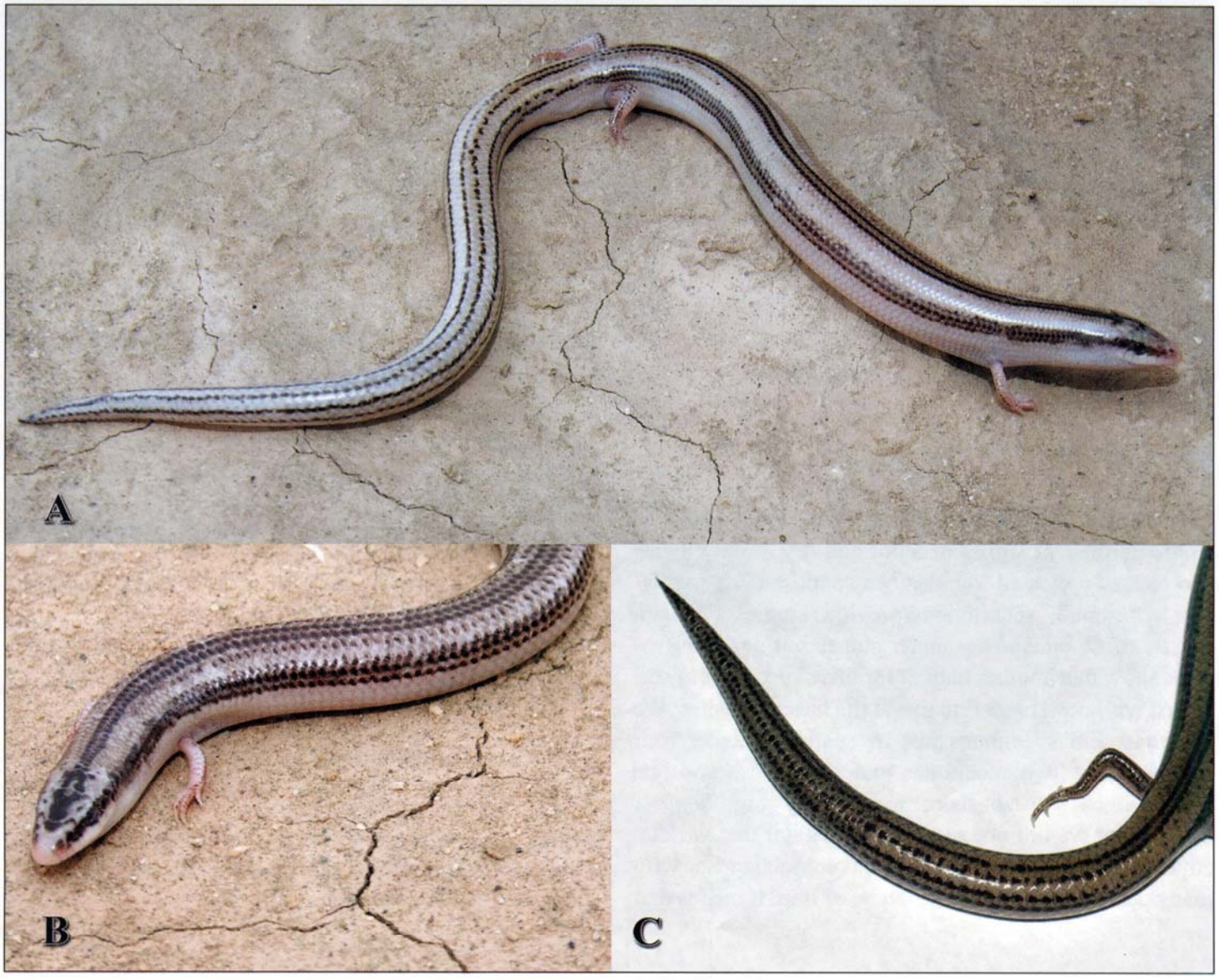

Fig. 2. *Ophiomorus nuchalis* color pattern. Photograph by O. Mozaffari.

Fig. 3. Habitat of *Ophiomorus nuchalis*. Photograph by O. Mozaffari.

velox, *Mesalina watsonana*, *Bunopus crassicaudus*, *Trachylepis aurata*, and *Spalerosophis diadema*.

DISCUSSION

Owing to the unique condition of the type locality (a single permanent spring in a hot and dry environment) and lack of collected samples, we supposed the population to be small. According to previous studies, the main habitat of *O. nuchalis* is under stones but our observations show that another habitat for this skink is loose soil mixed with dead plant remains at the base of bushes. We collected four specimens just by searching under four small bushes (two specimens under one bush and one bush without). Also there were many big *Tamarix* bushes that we did not search. The habitat that we discovered as that of *O. nuchalis*, is a common landscape in many deserts in the Central Plateau of Iran. It means that distribution of *O. nuchalis* is broader than previously expected.

Also our observations show that there is no sexual dimorphism in coloration and in the number of longitudinal scale rows around middle of body.

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