

Short Communications

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First record of the genus *Ptyodactylus* GOLDFUSS, 1820 (Sauria: Gekkonidae) for Mauritania (West Africa)

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Abstract. We report the first record of *Ptyodactylus ragazzi* (Reptilia: Gekkonidae) and hence the first record of the genus *Ptyodactylus* for Mauritania (West Africa). This record is based on four specimens found active during the night in rocky areas of Guelta Matmata, Wilaya Tagant, Mauritania (17°53.571'N/12°07.467'W). The area belongs to the environment of the Sahara, although the permanent presence of water in several places of this mountain area allows the survival of relict Sahelian and Afrotropical species. With our finding, reptile species richness of Mauritania increases to 87 species.

Key words. Reptilia, Gekkonidae, *Ptyodactylus*, Mauritania, Sahara desert, Sahel

Ptyodactylus ragazzi (ANDERSON, 1898) was described as a variant of *P. hasselquistii* (DONNDORFF, 1798), and considered a mere subspecies (e. g., HEIMES 1987) until SCHLEICH et al. (1996) re-elevated *P. ragazzi* to full species category without supporting arguments. Later, BAHA EL DIN (1999) reassessed the taxonomic status of both *P. h. hasselquistii* and *P. h. ragazzi* and recognized the latter as a valid species based on its behaviour, size, external morphology and colour pattern. *Ptyodactylus ragazzi* has been reported from rocky mesic areas of the Sahara desert and the Sahelian savannas of Eritrea and Egypt (BAHA EL DIN 1999, 2006), Nigeria (DUNGER 1968; BUTLER 1986), Cameroon (LE BRETON 1999), Benin (BAUER et al. 2006) and Mali (HEIMES 1987; JOGER & LAMBERT 1996). Another species of *Ptyodactylus*, *P. oudrii* LATASTE, 1880 (formerly *P. hasselquistii oudrii*) occurs in the northern Sahara from Tunisia to Western Sahara (GENIEZ et al., 2004). WELCH (1980) reported *P. hasselquistii* (a species from the eastern Sahara, Arabia, Israel, and Jordan) for Mauritania without locality or voucher, and neither HEIMES (1987) nor SCHLEICH et al. (1996) cited this species for the country. Although PADIAL (2006)

considered the presence of both *P. oudrii* and *P. ragazzi* in Saharan environments of Mauritania very likely, no species of *Ptyodactylus* has hitherto been properly recognized for this country.

Recent fieldwork of the authors in Central Mauritania revealed the presence of a population of *P. ragazzi* (Figs. 1 and 2). This represents the first species record and the confirmation of the presence of the genus *Ptyodactylus* in Mauritania. Four specimens were found during the night of 29 October 2006 perching on rocky walls and boulders at the shore of Guelta Matmata (Fig. 3), Wilaya Adrar, Mauritania (coordinates: 17°53.571'N/12°07.467'W). Two adults were collected and deposited in the reptile collection of Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales, Madrid, Spain (MNCN-43894-5). For ensuring the assignment of our specimens to this species we compared our vouchers with the original description of the species by ANDERSON (1898), digital pictures of the syntypes of *P. ragazzi* (BM 96.5.19.12-18) and the re-descriptions by BAHA EL DIN (1999, 2006). Our specimens do not present the reticulated dorsal colour pattern traditionally described for individuals of *P. ragazzi* from other parts of its distribution,



Fig. 1. Adult male *Ptyodactylus ragazzi* from Guelta Matmata, Wilaya Tagant, Mauritania.

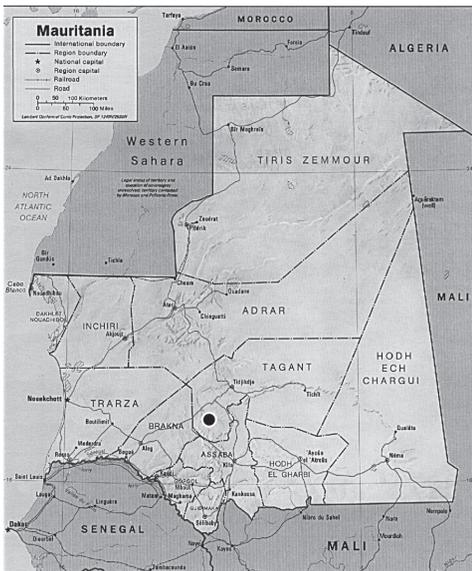


Fig. 2. Map of Mauritania with a circle indicating the locality of the first record of *Ptyodactylus ragazzi* for the country.

their pattern instead consisting of a creamy-orange background and four vertebral large grey blotches; the head has a combination of creamy-orange and grey spots, and the tail is creamy orange (Fig. 1).

All specimens observed were very active around 21–23h on the extremely hot (>30 °C) surface of the rocks, which was still very hot at dawn next day. These rocky walls were shared with *Tarentola parvicarinata* JOGER, 1980 and *Agama boulengeri* LATASTE, 1886. Other rep-



Fig. 3. Typical rocky habitat in Guelta Matmata, Wilaya Tagant, Mauritania, where four specimens of *Ptyodactylus ragazzi* were found active during the night.

tiles found at the same time in this locality were *Crocodylus suchus* (GEOFFROY SAINT-HILAIRE, 1807), *Varanus niloticus* (LINNAEUS, 1766), *Echis cf. leucogaster* ROMAN, 1972, and the amphibians, *Amietophrynus regularis* (REUSS, 1833) and *Hoplobatrachus occipitalis* (GÜNTHER, 1858).

Although central Mauritania belongs to the Sahara Desert, some isolated mountains show climatic conditions and habitats more similar to those of the Sahel (DEKEYSER & VILLIERS 1956). Moreover, the permanent presence of water in mountain streams (Gueltas) allows the survival in this area of relict Sahelian and Afrotropical species of amphibians (PADIAL & DE LA RIVA 2004), and reptiles as *Varanus niloticus*, *Crocodylus suchus* or *Python sebae* GMELIN, 1788 in sympatry with strictly Saharan species such as *Uromastix dispar* RÜPPEL, 1827 (SHINE et al., 2001; PADIAL, 2006). Hence, it seems that *P. ragazzi* is a Sahelian species with a patchy Saharan distribution associated with mountain areas with appropriate conditions. The broad and patchy distribution and the observed variation in colour pattern deserve further study on the taxonomic status of certain populations of what is currently called *P. ragazzi*. Whatever the proper status of the Mauritanian populations, with our finding the reptile diversity of this country increases to 87 species, although we suspect that many other await discovery.

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