

COLUBER *(Laurenti, 1768)* GEMONENSIS

The only correct scientific name of the Balkan Whipsnake

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In *Litteratura Serpenti* 15 (5):148 a species list was published in connection with the BUDEP-law (the new Dutch law concerning threatened foreign animals and plants). In this list the Balkan Whipsnake is mentioned under the binomial *Coluber laurenti*, a nomenclature used before by several authors (Grüber, 1989:77-79; Fritz, 1992:55) after a publication by Schätti and Lanza (1988).

In their publication the latter referred to the fact that the name *Coluber gemonensis* (Laurenti, 1758), which has been in use since the late twenties (Mertens and Müller, 1928), no longer applies since the type specimens used by Laurenti in 1768 for his original description of *Natrix gemonensis* most likely belonged to a different taxon: *Coluber viridiflavus*. Schätti and Lanza reached this conclusion based on Laurenti's description of the type material - which is probably lost - and the location of the 'type locality' (Gemona, Friuli) which is situated more than 80 Km outside the currently known distributional range of *gemonensis*. This would make *Natrix gemonensis* (Laurenti, 1768) a senior synonym of *Coluber viridiflavus* Lacépède, 1789.

Based on the principle of priority in nomenclature, Schätti and Lanza therefore proposed *Coluber laurenti* (Bedriaga,

1881) as the proper scientific name for the Balkan Whipsnake. The nomen *laurenti* had been used by Bedriaga (1881) for the description of a variety of the Balkan Whipsnake, *Zamensis gemonensis* var. *laurenti*, which is very common on the Greek Attika peninsula. By many authors this name was later considered a synonym of the nominate species (Schätti and Lanza, 1988). In the last century, the genus *Zamensis* Wagler, 1830 included several different taxa of whip snakes (Boulenger, 1893). The name of this genus is no longer valid since it is considered a synonym of *Elaphe* Fitzinger, 1833.

In the group of western palearctic whip snakes the arrangement of the taxa into different genera has often been the subject of heated discussions (Inger and Clark, 1943; Dowling and Duellman, 1978; Welch, 1982, 1983; Schätti, 1988). In the confused situation that thus arose, a definite danger existed that this confusion would extend to the species nomenclature as well. Schätti *et al.* (1991) therefore pleaded for stability in the nomenclature and addressed the ICZN (International Committee for Zoölogical Nomenclature) in order to preserve the name *C. gemonensis* Laurenti, 1768 as the correct scientific name for the Balkan Whipsnake. The stability of the binomial *C. gemonensis* was validated by the description of a specimen from Cegar, Croatia (adult male, MHNG 1357.70) as neotype. In their proposition the authors also pleaded for the conservation of the name *C. viridiflavus* Lacépède, 1789, a name that was endangered

by a decision of the ICZN (opinion 1463, BZN 44:265-267) in which was decided that the work of Lacépède could no longer be used for nomenclatoric purposes, since the author had not used binomial names. The proposal of Schätti et al. (1991) was accepted by the ICZN in opinion 1686 (BZN 49(2): 174-175).

In this note I do not wish to elaborate on the classification of all palearctic whip snakes in the genus *Coluber* (sensu lato), or on the assignment of *gemonensis* to the genus *Hierophis* Fitzinger, 1834, a genus which currently comprises all taxa of the *jugularis-viridiflavus*-group (Schätti, 1988). These are strictly taxonomical options, which show that the taxonomy of the entire group of palearctic whip snakes still remains to be resolved. Basically, this note solely deals with a single nomenclatorial problem: the use of the species name *gemonensis* as the only correct scientific name for the Balkan Whipsnake.

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