



Taxonomy of the Threadsnakes of the tribe Epictini (Squamata: Serpentes: Leptotyphlopidae) in Colombia

ROBERTA RICHARD PINTO^{1,5}, PAULO PASSOS², JOSÉ RANCES CAICEDO PORTILLA³,
JUAN CAMILO ARREDONDO⁴ & RONALDO FERNANDES¹

¹Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Departamento de Vertebrados, Museu Nacional, Quinta da Boa Vista, São Cristóvão, Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 20940-040, Brazil

²Laboratório de Herpetologia, Instituto Butantan, Av. Vital Brazil 1500, São Paulo, São Paulo, 05503-900, Brazil

³Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Instituto de Ciencias Naturales, Laboratorio de Anfíbios, Apartado 1495, Bogotá D.C., Colômbia

⁴Universidade de São Paulo, Museu de Zoologia, Caixa Postal 42494, São Paulo, São Paulo, 04218-170, Brazil

⁵Corresponding author. E-mail: robertarich@gmail.com

Abstract

Threadsnakes of the tribe Epictini are endemic to the New World, occurring from the United States to Argentina, mostly in the Neotropical region. Currently, the taxonomic status of most species is unclear and there has been no previous attempt of a comprehensive taxonomic revision of Neotropical taxa. Taxonomy of the group is a difficult task due to the paucity of geographic samples, general homogeneous morphology and brevity of species descriptions. Therefore, the only way to address the taxonomic status of existing names is through detailed characterization of the types and the search for additional material of the poorly known species. In this study, we evaluated the taxonomic status of the Colombian threadsnakes and report on geographical variation of meristic, morphometric, colour pattern, and hemipenis characters. On the basis of available samples we recognize the following species in Colombia: *Epictia goudotii*, *E. magnamaculata*, *E. signata*, *Rena nicefori*, *Tricheilostoma brevissimum*, *T. dugandi*, *T. joshuai* and *T. macrolepis*. We discuss the systematic position of *Rena nicefori* and propose its allocation in the genus *Tricheilostoma* based on a unique combination of morphological characters. Furthermore, we provide a key to the representatives of the tribe Epictini in Colombia.

Key words: *Tricheilostoma brevissimum*, *Tricheilostoma dugandi*, *Tricheilostoma joshuai*, *Tricheilostoma macrolepis*, *Epictia goudotii*, *Epictia magnamaculata*, *Epictia signata*, *Rena nicefori*

Introduction

The fossorial snake genus *Leptotyphlops*, as traditionally understood, comprised 114 species distributed over America, Africa and southwestern Asia (McDiarmid *et al.* 1999; Passos *et al.* 2006; Boundy & Wallach 2008; Pinto & Curcio *in press*). Recently, Adalsteinsson *et al.* (2009) performed a comprehensive molecular phylogeny of the family Leptotyphlopidae, recognizing two main lineages: the subfamily Epictinae distributed mostly in the Neotropical region (tribe Epictini) and Equatorial Africa (tribe Rhinoleptini), and Leptotyphlopinae occurring throughout Africa (north and south of the Sahara Desert), the Arabian Peninsula, and southwestern Asia (Adalsteinsson *et al.* 2009).

Members of the tribe Epictini comprise six genera and 56 currently recognized species (sensu Adalsteinsson *et al.* 2009), distributed in the New World from southern United States to Argentina (Adalsteinsson *et al.* 2009). Among these taxa, three genera and seven species are usually recognized for Colombia (see McDiarmid *et al.* 1999), despite disagreements in the literature with respect to previous records of *Epictia albifrons* (Pérez-Santos & Moreno 1988; McDiarmid *et al.* 1999). Based exclusively on voucher specimens, the following taxa are known from Colombia: *Epictia goudotii* (Duméril & Bibron, 1844), *Tricheilostoma macrolepis* (Peters, 1858), *E. magnamaculata* (Taylor, 1939), *T. brevissimum* (Dunn, 1944), *T. dugandi* (Dunn, 1944), *T. joshuai* (Dunn, 1944), and *Rena nicefori* (Dunn, 1946).