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Three new endemic species of *Epictia* Gray, 1845 (Serpentes: Leptotyphlopidae) from the dry forest of northwestern Peru

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Abstract

Three new blind snake species of the genus *Epictia* are described based on material collected in the Peruvian Regions Amazonas, Cajamarca and La Libertad. All three species are well differentiated from all congeners based on characteristics of their morphology and coloration. They share 10 scale rows around the middle of the tail and possess two supralabials with the anterior one in broad contact with the supraocular. *Epictia septemlineata* **sp. nov.** has 16 subcaudal scales, 257 mid-dorsal scale rows, a yellowish-white rostral, and a black terminal spine. *Epictia vanwallachi* **sp. nov.** exhibits 16 subcaudals, 188 mid-dorsal scale rows, a grayish-brown rostral, and a yellow terminal spine. *Epictia antoniogarciai* **sp. nov.** features 14–18 subcaudals, 195–208 mid-dorsal scale rows, a bright yellow or yellowish-white rostral, and the terminal spine and terminal portion of the tail yellow. All three species were collected in the interandean dry forest valleys of the Marañón River and its tributaries. This region is an area of endemism and warrants further attention from systematic and conservation biologists.

Key words: Andes, Blind snake, fossorial snake, slender blind snakes, thread snakes, burrowing snake, dry forest, Epictini, *Leptotyphlops*, Marañón valley, Reptilia, Squamata

Introduction

The blind snake family Leptotyphlopidae Stejneger, 1892 consists of 117 fossorial species with vestigial eyes that spend most of their time buried in loose soil, or under stones or logs, making their detection in the field difficult. According to a molecular phylogeny of this family (Adalsteinsson *et al.* 2009), two subfamilies are currently recognized (Leptotyphlopinae Stejneger, 1892 and Epictinae Hedges, Adalsteinsson, & Branch, 2009), of which only the Epictinae occur in South America. Adalsteinsson *et al.* (2009) further recognize two tribes (Epictini Hedges, Adalsteinsson, & Branch, 2009 and Rhinoleptini Hedges, Adalsteinsson, & Branch, 2009) and eight genera (*Epictia* Gray, 1845*, Guinea* Hedges, Adalsteinsson, & Branch, 2009*, Mitophis* Hedges, Adalsteinsson, & Branch, 2009*, Rena* Baird & Girard, 1853, *Rhinoleptus* Orejas-Miranda, Roux-Estève & Guibé, 1970*, Siagonodon* Peters, 1881*, Tetracheilostoma* Jan, 1861, and *Tricheilostoma* Jan, 1860) within the subfamily Epictinae. Within the type genus *Epictia* of the Neotropical tribe Epictini they further recognize 25 species. Arredondo & Zaher (2010) described *Epictia clinorostris* from Central Brazil, and Franco & Pinto (2009) consider *Stenostoma* [*Epictia*] *albifrons* Wagler, 1824 as a nomen dubium due to the loss of the holotype and the lack of diagnostic characters for the species. Thus 25 species are currently recognized to belong to this genus and 13 of these are known from Peru: *Epictia albipuncta* (Burmeister, 1861), *E. alfredschmidti* (Lehr, Wallach, Köhler & Aguilar, 2002), *E. diaplocia* (Orejas-Miranda, 1969), *E. melanura* (Schmidt & Walker, 1943), *E. peruviana* (Orejas-Miranda, 1969), *E. rubrolineata* (Werner, 1901), *E. rufidorsa* (Taylor, 1940), *E. striatula* (Smith & Laufe, 1945*), E. subcrotilla* (Klauber, 1939), *E. teaguei* (Orejas-Miranda, 1964), *E. tenella* (Klauber, 1939), *E. tesselata* (Tschudi, 1845), and *E. tricolor* (Orejas-Miranda & Zug, 1974). Little is known about the Peruvian species of the genus

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