

Variation and taxonomic status of the aquatic coral snake *Micrurus surinamensis* (Cuvier, 1817) (Serpentes: Elapidae)

PAULO PASSOS & DANIEL S. FERNANDES

Departamento de Vertebrados, Museu Nacional/UFRJ, Quinta da Boa Vista, 20940-040, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil.

E-mail: ppassos@mn.ufrj.br

Abstract

The taxonomic status of *Micrurus surinamensis* (Cuvier, 1817), is revised and variation on data concerning external morphology, osteology and hemipenis are described. *Micrurus s. nattereri* Schmidt, 1952 is here considered as a species, based on the number of ventral scales, shape of posterior portion of parietal bone, and length of supratemporals.

Key words: Serpentes, Elapidae, *Micrurus*, osteology, taxonomy

Introduction

The New World coral snake genus *Micrurus* is currently recognized as a monophyletic group, occurring from southeastern United States to southern South America (Slowinski, 1995; Campbell & Lamar, 2004). Roze (1996) provided a comprehensive taxonomic revision of this assemblage and recognized 57 species. Jorge da Silva & Sites (2001) pointed out that more than 120 named entities (species and subspecies) are available. Nevertheless, the status of several species and subspecies should be reevaluated considering a larger amount of specimens, which would improve the statistical support for their recognition (Wiens & Servedio, 2000; Benavides *et al.*, 2002).

The aquatic coral snake *Micrurus surinamensis* was described by Cuvier in 1817 based on two specimens from Suriname. Schmidt (1952) described *M. surinamensis nattereri* based on four specimens from Guramoca and San Fernando [corrected to Guaramaco, and San Fernando de Atabapo by Hoge & Lancini (1960)], Upper Orinoco River, southern Venezuela. The nominal subspecies is reasonably well represented in collections, occurring through the Amazon region of Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, French Guyana, and Suriname (Campbell & Lamar, 2004). *Micrurus surinamensis*