



On the live holotype of the Galápagos pink land Iguana, *Conolophus marthae* Gentile & Snell, 2009 (Squamata: Iguanidae): is it an acceptable exception?

ANDRÉ NEMÉSIO¹

¹Laboratório de Sistemática e Ecologia Animal, Centro Universitário Vila Velha, Unidade Acadêmica II, Ciências Biológicas. Rua Comissário José Dantas de Mello 21, Boa Vista, Vila Velha, ES. 29102-770. Brazil. E-mail: andre.nemesio@gmail.com

Abstract

The Galápagos pink land iguana, *Conolophus marthae* Gentile & Snell, 2009 (Squamata: Iguanidae) is the latest example of a species being described without the proper deposition of a preserved onomatophore (name-bearing type specimen) in a taxonomic collection. Differently from other recent similar descriptions, the holotype of *Conolophus marthae* was marked with a Passive Integrated Transponder, allegedly allowing it to be tracked and found after its death, when it would be deposited at the Governmental Galápagos collection. Although apparently fulfilling the criteria of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature, I here argue that this practice should not be followed and that the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature should urgently act to standardize criteria that should be met by those describing species found at the brink of extinction.

Key words: International Code of Zoological Nomenclature, Nomenclature, taxonomy

Introduction

The recent description of some animal species without the proper deposition of preserved specimens as onomatophores (name-bearing type specimens) has caused an intense debate on the availability of these nomina under the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (hereafter referred to as the *Code*). This recent “fashion” of describing species without the deposition of preserved onomatophores was started by Smith *et al.* (1991) and followed by Jones *et al.* (2005), Athreya (2006), Mendes Pontes *et al.* (2006), among others, and, now, by Gentile and Snell (2009). All species described by the above mentioned authors are vertebrates (two bird, two mammal, and one iguana species) and their authors argued, at the time of description, that known populations were very small and that taking a single individual to be the onomatophore could directly contribute to make those species extinct. Strong reaction against this *modus operandi* of describing species without the deposition of onomatophores in collections was immediately seen, starting by Banks *et al.* (1993) and followed by Landry (2005), Moser (2005), Timm *et al.* (2005), Naish (2006), and Oliveira & Langguth (2006). On the other hand, three former secretaries of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (hereafter referred to as ICZN) co-authored articles supporting the point of view that the *Code* allows such descriptions without the deposition of preserved onomatophores (Wakeham-Dawson *et al.* 2002, Polaszek *et al.* 2005). Dubois & Nemésio (2007) and Nemésio (2009) deeply discussed the argumentation provided by both sides of the debate, showed that the opinions provided by the former ICZN secretaries in Wakeham-Dawson *et al.* (2002) and Polaszek *et al.* (2005) were personal opinions, not a formal decision, and suggested an amendment of the *Code* to make it clear, and explicit, what some apparent ambiguous and contradictory articles of the *Code* did stand for. Dubois & Nemésio’s (2007) suggestion to rephrase articles 16.4 and 73.1.4 of the *Code*, even including an article numbered 16.4.3, went in the direction of making it explicit that deposition of preserved onomatophores should be obligatory to make a