



A new species of *Leiosaurus* (Iguania: Leiosauridae) from central-western Argentina

¹ALEJANDRO LASPIUR, ²JUAN CARLOS ACOSTA & ³CRISTIAN S. ABDALA

^{1,2}Departamento de Biología e Instituto y Museo de Ciencias Naturales, Facultad de Ciencias Exactas, Físicas y Naturales, Universidad Nacional de San Juan. Av. España 400 (N), CP: 5400, San Juan, Argentina

³Instituto de Herpetología, Fundación Miguel Lillo – CONICET y Facultad de Ciencias Naturales e IML, UNT. Miguel Lillo 205. Tucumán. Argentina. E-mail: ¹laspisaurus@gmail.com; ²jacosta@sinectis.com.ar; ³popper@tucbbs.com.ar

Abstract

In this paper we describe a new species of the *Leiosaurus* genus from central-western Argentina. This new taxon presents remarkable differences regarding the lepidosis and coloration pattern compared to the other species of the genus: *L. catamarcensis*, *L. paronae* and *L. bellii*. The dorsal coloration pattern is unique and is characterized by dorsal markings similar to the colour design of some felines like the jaguar. This new species inhabits the highlands of central-western Argentina where steppe bunch grasses with low plant formation and low spiny shrubs prevail. However, little is known of its biology as with the other species of the genus *Leiosaurus*. The discovery of this new taxon is significant, because it has been one hundred years since the last description of a new species of these taxa.

Key words: Leiosauridae, *Leiosaurus* sp. nov., La Rioja, San Juan, Argentina

Introduction

The genus *Leiosaurus* was described by Duméril and Bibron (1837) to include a new species which was assigned Mexico as type locality by mistake. The species described was *Leiosaurus bellii*, widely distributed among southern Argentina. Thereinafter, new species were described also in Argentina, *Leiosaurus darwini* Bell, *Leiosaurus fasciatus* d'Orbigny (Koslowsky, 1898) and *Leiosaurus bardensis* (Gallardo, 1968). All these species were included into the *Leiosaurus* genus and removed from it due to their synonymy with *Diplolaemus* according to the proposal of Donoso-Barros (1965). At present the genus *Leiosaurus* is represented according to Frost *et al.*, (2001) by three species: *L. catamarcensis* Koslowsky 1898, *L. paronae* Peracca, 1897 (Ceï, 1986) and *L. bellii* Duméril and Bibron, 1837, all of them distributed in Argentina. The genus *Leiosaurus* is composed by species which have stout body, wide head caused by the presence of large jaw muscles. However, the characters unique to the genus are: surface of the subdigital lamellae keeled; smooth tail scales; without caudal autotomy; tail slightly longer than body; no contact between orbital semi-circles; dorsal coloration pattern with defined vertebral spots, “shark teeth” or “fleur-de-lis” shaped (Ceï, 1986; Frost *et al.*, 2001).

There is little information about the geographic distribution of *Leiosaurus* and little knowledge of the species included in the group. Nonetheless, Ceï (1973) presents a general map with *Leiosaurus* together to *Diplolaemus*, *Aperopristis* and *Cuprigranus* geographic distribution. The San Juan and La Rioja Provinces represent a complex system where high geological formations alternate with intermountained tectonic valleys (Suvires *et al.*, 1999). These geomorphologic regional features represent geographical barriers and can generate morphological differences in the species (Irschick *et al.*, 1997; McCranie *et al.*, 2001) considering in