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## A new giant *Atractus* (Serpentes: Dipsadidae) from Ecuador, with notes on some other large Amazonian congeners

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### Abstract

We describe a new species of *Atractus* from Cordillera de los Guacamayos in the Andes of Ecuador. This new species is the largest known species of *Atractus*, reaching almost 120 cm in total length with a robust habitus. We also use multivariate statistical analyses of morphometric data to look into the taxonomic confusion involving other large, banded/blotched, species of *Atractus* in Western Amazonia. We show that *A. snethlageae* has a widespread distribution in Amazonia and has been repeatedly confused with *A. major* in Ecuador owing to its color polymorphism. Our multivariate statistical analyses support previous suggestions to recognize *A. snethlageae* as a distinct species relative to *A. flammigerus*. Taxonomic accounts are provided for both *A. major* and *A. snethlageae* including detailed color pattern descriptions. We also find that there are no valid morphological differences to support recognizing *A. arangoi* as a separate species from *A. major*; consequently we synonymize the former name with the latter.

**Key words:** *Atractus major*, *Atractus snethlageae*, *Atractus touzeti*, Cordillera de Los Guacamayos, rainforest, reptiles, snakes

### Introduction

The genus *Atractus* consists of generally small, semi-fossorial or cryptozoic snakes that feed mostly on earthworms and other small invertebrates (Martins & Oliveira 1993, 1999). The genus is distributed from central Panama (Myers 2003) to northeastern Argentina (Giraud & Scrocchi 2000); ranging across a wide variety of habitats from lowland rainforest and Neotropical savannas to cloud forest and páramos in the Andes and even inhabiting the summits of some tepuis (the table-top mountains in the Guayana Region). Currently more than 130 species are recognized in *Atractus* (Passos et al. 2012), which makes it the most species-rich genus of snakes in the world. The taxonomy of this genus, however, remains in a confused state especially in regard to species boundaries. Several factors have made taxonomic studies of *Atractus* a difficult task. The main problem seems to be the scarcity of specimens in collections, which may reflect the difficulty of collecting these snakes because of their secretive habits (Downs 1967; Myers 2003). Consequently, many species of *Atractus* are known from only a few specimens. To complicate matters, the original descriptions of many of the species in this genus are basic and lack a proper diagnosis. Regrettably, most of the work done so far to expand our knowledge on the variation of these species covers only a fraction of the genus.

The first modern taxonomic review of *Atractus* was undertaken by Savage (1960) for Ecuador. This work