

## REPTILE OBSERVATIONS IN YEMEN, MARCH - MAY 1993

DAVE A. SHOWLER

125 Rupert Street, Norwich, NR2 2AX

### INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1993 from 16th March to 10th May, the Ornithological Society of the Middle East (OSME) mounted an expedition to survey some lesser known areas of southern and eastern Yemen. During this time I was able to make some observations of the reptiles that were encountered. (See also BHS Bulletin No. 52, 'Amphibian Observations in Yemen').

Yemen has a rich reptilian fauna consisting of about eighty terrestrial species (excluding the Socotra archipelago), five species of marine turtle and one sea-snake. Many of the terrestrial species are endemic or near endemic to the Arabian Peninsula. Several species are endemic within this region to a distinctive area of southern Arabia which encompasses the highlands of south-west Saudi Arabia, Yemen northwards to the southern edge of the Rub al Khali and the Dhofar region of eastern Yemen and Oman.

The terrestrial reptile fauna of Yemen may be broadly summarised as follows (numbers in parentheses refer to the number of species endemic to the Arabian Peninsula/number of species endemic to southern Arabia):

Testudinidae; Tortoises: 1 species (0/0)  
Pelomedusidae; Side-necked terrapins: 1 species (0/0)  
Agamidae; Agamid lizards: 8 species (7/3)  
Chamaeleonidae; Chameleons: 3 species (2/2)  
Gekkonidae; Geckos: 25 species (15/8)  
Lacertidae; Lacertid lizards: 12 species (9/6)  
Scincidae; Skinks: 8 species (4/0)  
Varanidae; Monitors: 2 species (1/1)  
Trogonophidae; Amphisbaenians: 1 species (1/1)  
Serpentes; Snakes: 21 (up to 28) species (7/4)

### SPECIES ACCOUNTS

During the OSME survey a total of 42 species of reptile were recorded; one terrapin, three marine turtles, six agamid lizards, two chameleons, fifteen geckos, four lacertid lizards, five skinks, one monitor and five species of snake.

Species endemic or near-endemic to Arabia are indicated with one asterisk. Species endemic to Yemen are indicated with two asterisks.

**Order Chelonia** – Terrapins, marine turtles and tortoises.

One species of freshwater terrapin *Pelomedusa subrufa*, and one species of tortoise *Geochelone sulcata* are known to occur in Yemen.

Five species of marine turtle; *Caretta caretta*, *Chelonia mydas*, *Eretmochelys imbricata*, *Lepidochelys olivacea* and *Dermochelys coriacea* have been recorded around the Yemeni coast and *C. mydas* is known to breed.

### **Family Pelomedusidae – Side-necked terrapins**

#### ***Pelomedusa subrufa* – Helmeted Terrapin**

1- 19.3.93, Taizz lagoons, approx. 44°01'E 13°34'N, 1150m.

One basking on floating mat of dead vegetation, another resting just below water surface with only nostrils protruding.

2- 27.3.93, Wadi al-Jahr, 46°23'. 50E 13°58.20N, 600m.

Two basking on boulders in flowing wadi.

Distribution & Comments: In Arabia this species is confined to the extreme south-west where it occurs in Saudi Arabia & western Yemen. The survey record from Wadi al-Jahr may represent an easterly range extension in Yemen. *P. subrufa* also occurs over much of sub-saharan Africa & Madagascar. This species is able to aestivate in drought conditions.

### **Family Cheloniidae – Marine turtles**

#### ***Caretta caretta gigas* – Loggerhead Turtle**

1- 16.4.93, Mocha (Red Sea coast), 43°15'E 13°18'N

At least four adults observed close inshore, some holding their heads vertically above the water surface for several seconds.

2- 23.4.93, Sayhut, 51°17'E 15°14'N.

At least four offshore, several more in vicinity and along the coast eastwards.

Distribution & Comments: This species is widely distributed in tropical & sub-tropical waters of the Indian Ocean (also in the Mediterranean, Pacific and Atlantic) and there are some major nesting beaches on islands off the Arabian coast.

#### ***Chelonia mydas japonica* – Green Turtle**

Numerous observations from Mocha on the Red Sea coast 43°15'E 13°18'N, eastwards along the southern Yemen coastline to almost the Omani border. In the vicinity of Al Fatk, 52°42'E 16°31'N, approx. 400 recent nests probably of this species, were counted on the beach.

Distribution & Comments: Widespread in tropical & sub-tropical waters of the Indian Ocean (also in the Mediterranean, Pacific & Atlantic). Known to nest on the southern Yemen coast in significant numbers.

#### ***Eretmochelys imbricata bissa* – Hawksbill Turtle**

1- 16.4.93, Mocha (Red Sea coast), 43°15'E 13°18'N.

Small dead specimen on beach, carapace 30cm, cause of death not apparent.

2- 22.4.93, Al Hami, 49°50'E 14°49'N.

At least two approx. 50m offshore.

3- 23.4.93, Sayhut, 51°17'E 15°14'N.

Two close inshore.

Distribution & Comments: Widespread in tropical & sub-tropical waters of the Indian Ocean (also in the Pacific & Atlantic).

### **Order Squamata – Lizards and snakes**

## Sub-order Sauria – Lizards

About 58 species of lizard and one amphisbaenian have been recorded on mainland Yemen although the taxonomic status of some is uncertain. During the survey about 33 species were recorded. (Two species whose identification was not positively ascertained are indicated with a question mark).

### Family Agamidae – Agamid lizards

#### \* *Pseudotrapelus adramitanus*

Recorded at numerous localities in the west Yemen highlands but in many cases individuals were not differentiated from *P.yemenensis*. Also observed at Wadi Mararah (Dhofar), 52°55'E 16°39'N, 360m.

Distribution & Comments: Endemic to western and southern Arabia from Taif (Saudi Arabia) to Aden (Yemen) and east to Dhofar. It occurs usually below 2000m.

#### \* *Pseudotrapelus yemenensis* – Yemen Agama

Several observations in the vicinity of Sana'a and also the Central Highland Research Station near Dhamar, at an altitude of 2400m.

Distribution & Comments: Endemic to the highlands of western Yemen & south-west Saudi Arabia where it occurs usually about 2000m.

#### *Pseudotrapelus sinaitus*

1- 19.4.93, Wadi Harim nr. Am Nabiyah, approx. 43°41'E 12°48'N, approx. 100m. Four observed.

2- 20.4.93, Ras al'Arah, 43°53'E 12°40'N, 50m.

One lying flat on stony ground in 'camouflage posture'. When picked up its head colouration turned from a buffy brown to blue in approx. 3-4 minutes.

3- 1/2.5.93, desert crossing between Al Ghayda 52°11'E 16°13'N westwards to the vicinity of Fughmah approx. 49°27'E 16°10'N, up to 875m.

Numerous observations.

Distribution & Comments: Widespread in Arabia (absent from Rub al Khali) north to Palestine & Jordan, and also Egypt and southeast Libya. During the survey this species was observed from almost the southern most tip of the Arabian Peninsula near Wadi Harim eastwards to Al Ghayda. It is probably widespread throughout Yemen in the lowlands (below 1000m). In sandy desert areas restricted to localities with at least some outcrops of rock and scattered boulders providing lookout points and refuges.

#### \* *Phrynocephalus arabicus* – Arabian Toad-headed Agama

1- 5.5.93, Al Mudhur, 48°25'E 15°49'N, 790m.

Two in abandoned/fallow sandy fields with some patches of low xerophytic, vegetation.

2- 6.5.93, 10km N.W. of Arain & Turbaq hills, 46° 36'E 15° 44'N, 1000m.

Three or more, including one tail-signalling male, on shifting sand dunes with fresh growth of feather-grass *Stipa* sp.

Distribution & Comments: Endemic to the Arabian Peninsula where it is widespread except in the west. The survey record from Al Mudhur is close to the type locality on the 'Plateau of the Hadramaut'.

#### \* *Uromastyx aegyptius microlepis* – Small-grain or Desert Spiny-tailed Lizard

1- 2.5.93, approx. 230km W of al-Ghaydah, approx. 51°E 16°N, 790m.

One taking refuge in burrow on almost flat, limestone rubble and dust hammada desert with very sparse vegetation cover, mostly of low mats of xerophytic shrubs and a few small *Acacia* trees.

2- 1.5.93, > 61-84km west of al-Ghaydah 51°35'E 16°13'N, approx. 650m.

A *Uromastix* sp. was seen retreating down a burrow. The habitat would suggest that this was *U. microlepis*.

**Distribution & Comments:** This species is widespread in the Arabian Peninsula north to Jordan & Iraq & east to Iran. The tail of *Uromastix* is used for fat storage and they are sometimes caught and eaten by local tribes people as a traditional delicacy.

\*\* *Uromastix benti* – Yemen Spiny-tailed Lizard

1- 24.4.93, Ras Uqab (12km east of Sayhut), 51°20'E 15°15'N, 1m.

One basking on rock about 50m from shoreline.

2- 30.4.93, Shahrut (west of Damqawt), approx. 52°46'E 16°33'N, < 10m.

One basking on large boulder pile, took refuge in rock crevice when approached.

3- 2.5.93, 5km E of Fugmah, 49°27'E 16°10'N, approx. 670m.

Piece of dessicated tail found amongst rocks on steep-sided rocky wadi edge.

4- 3.5.93, Al Ghurfah, 48°45'E 15°50'N, 780m.

One immature at dusk 'wedged' into boulder crevice in rocky wadi bed.

**Distribution & Comments:** Known only from eastern Yemen. The survey records would suggest that this species inhabits very rocky arid areas in both coastal and inland localities.

#### **Family Chamaeleonidae – Chameleons**

\* *Chamaeleo arabicus* – Arabian Chameleon

1- 25.4.93, Saqr, 51°56'E 15°32'N, 5m.

One in scrub in irrigated agricultural strip along the coastline with *Sorghum* fields and small date palm *Phoenix dactylifera* groves.

2- 28.4.93, Wadi Mararah, 52°55'E 16°39'N, 360m.

Dessicated head found in undergrowth.

**Distribution & Comments:** Endemic to southern Yemen & Dhofar. The record from Saqr represents a new but not unexpected locality for this species.

\* *Chamaeleo calypttratus calypttratus* – Yemen or Dumeril's Chameleon

1- 19.3.93, Taizz lagoons, 44°01'E 13°34'N, 1200m

One male climbing quickly into dense cover.

**Distribution & Comments:** This species is endemic to the south-west Arabian peninsula. The subspecies *C.c.calypttratus* is restricted to west Yemen and the record from Taizz lies within the known range. The subspecies *C.c.calcarifer* occurs in north-west Yemen and south-west Saudi Arabia.

#### **Family Gekkonidae – Geckos**

\* *Bunopus spatularus spatularus*

1- 27.3.93, Yashbum/Wadi Habban, 46°59.04'E 14°19.63'N, 1200m.

One spot-lighted after dark (21.00hrs.) on bare rocks in dry wadi bed.

**Distribution & Comments:** Endemic to the Arabian peninsula where it is known from Yemen, Oman, U.A.E. and central Saudi Arabia.

***Bunopus tuberculatus***

1- 5.5.93, 3km west of Shabwa, 47°01'E 15°23'N, 800m.

One spot-lighted after dark (20.00hrs.) on loose sand/gravel substrate with small hummocks of scattered xerophytic vegetation and occasional *Acacia* trees.

Distribution & Comments: Widespread in Arabia northwards to Syria and eastwards to Pakistan.

***Hemidactylus flaviviridis*** – Yellow-bellied House Gecko

1- 16.4.93, Bajil, 43°17'E 15°04'N, 250m.

One observed on house wall after dark.

Distribution & Comments: In Arabia found mainly in coastal areas. It also occurs in coastal north-east Africa and east to northern India.

***Hemidactylus turcicus*** – Turkish Gecko

Identified from photographs taken in the vicinity of Sana'a.

Distribution & Comments: Widespread in peripheral Arabia east to Pakistan, coastal areas fringing the Mediterranean and the Red Sea and north-east Africa south to Somalia.

***Hemidactylus yerburii***

1- 27.4.93, Wadi Mararah, 52°55'E 16°39'N, 360m.

Two observed after dark on boulders by small flowing stream with some marginal herbaceous vegetation.

Distribution & Comments: Occurs in the southern Arabian Peninsula from southwestern Saudi Arabia (Asir), Yemen eastwards to southern Oman. It also occurs in Somalia.

**\*\* *Pristurus collaris*** – Collared Semaphore Gecko

Recorded at ten localities, the most westerly at al-Shihr, 49°36'E 14°46'N to as far east as 10km west of Wadi Mararah, 52°50'E 16°40'N, and at altitudes from just above sea-level up to 760m in the hills inland from Quishn 51°41'E 15°25'N.

Distribution & Comments: A Yemen endemic previously known from Bal Haf to Ras Fartak and inland to the Hadramawt (Hadhramaut). The record from near Wadi Mararah represents an extension to the known range being about 150km north-east of Ras Fartak. This species appeared abundant in these localities and was observed to be diurnal and nocturnal.

***Pristurus crucifer*** – Semaphore Gecko

1 - 20.4.93, Ras al'Arah, 43°53'E 12°40'N, 50m.

Several observed running across ground on gravel substrate with sparse vegetation cover of low xerophytic plants in *Acacia* savannah. Sympatric with *P. ornithocephalus* and the mainly arboreal *P. flavipunctatus*.

Distribution & Comments: In Arabia restricted to the west and south-west coasts of Yemen. Elsewhere occurs in Somalia and the far north of Kenya. The one survey record lies within the species known range.

***Pristurus flavipunctatus*** – Semaphore Gecko

1- 22.3.93, Jebel Iraf, 44 15.31'E 13°07.02'N, 1400m.

Two seen on trunk of *Juniperus sp* in open juniper dominated woodland with some *Acacia* and other tree species.

2- 20.4.93, Ras al'Arah, 43°53'E 12°40'N, 50m.

Two in small branches of an *Acacia* approx. 2m from the ground and one at base of a small *Acacia* tree in *Acacia* savannah with a gravel/stone substrate.

**Distribution & Comments:** In Arabia occurs in the coastal Tihama of south-west Saudi Arabia and Yemen and also north-east Africa. The survey records lie within the known range. Unlike most other semaphore geckos this is generally an arboreal species.

\* *Pristurus minimus* – Small Semaphore Gecko

1- 26.4.93, al-Faydami plain, 52°28'E 16°25'N, < 10m.

At least ten observed at dusk on loose sand and especially amongst or near to small hummocks of woody, xerophytic vegetation.

**Distribution & Comments:** The first record of Yemen. It was previously known from Oman and has also recently been recorded in south-west Saudi Arabia.

\*\* *Pristurus ornithocephalus* – Bird-headed Semaphore Gecko

1- 28.3.93, Bir Ali, 48°19.50'E 14°0.50'N, < 20m.

One on basaltic rocks almost devoid of vegetation approx. 300m from coastline. 'Played dead' for almost one minute when caught (such behaviour maybe stress induced) before running off at great speed.

2- 29.3.93, Wadi Hajr, 44°41.33'E 14°05.66'N, 30m.

One on arid, sandy and rocky plain with occasional tussocks of xerophytic vegetation.

3- 19.4.93, Ras al 'Arah, 43°53'E 12°40'N, 50m.

One female observed at dusk (18.15 hrs.) on gravel plain in *Acacia* savannah.

**Distribution & Comments:** This species is endemic to coastal south-west Yemen. The three survey records lie within the known range.

*Pristurus rupestris* – Common Semaphore Gecko

Recorded throughout the west Yemen highlands at altitudes up to 2400m near Dhamar 44°21'E 14°39'N down to 600m at Wadi al-Jahr 46°23.50'E 13°58.20'N. The most easterly observation was at Yashbum/Wadi Habban, 46°59.04'E 14°19.63'N.

**Distribution & Comments:** Found around the periphery of Arabia, Djibouti, northern Somalia and Ethiopia, coastal Iran and possibly Pakistan. A common species of rocky areas in the Yemeni highlands.

*Ptyodactylus hasselquistii*

Recorded at nine localities the most westerly at Jebel Iraf 44°15.31'E 13°07.02'N, and the most easterly at Al Ghurfah (15km south-east of Tarim) 49°08'E 15°50'N. Observed at altitudes from 600m to 2000m and often heard calling at dusk.

**Distribution and Comments:** Widespread in Arabia probably north to Palestine, Syria and Iraq, southwest Iran and also North Africa. In Yemen a common species in rocky areas and also observed on building walls at Tarim.

\* *Stenodactylus doriae*

Recorded at up to seven localities; along the coast between Wadi Hajr 48°41'E 14°06'N eastwards to Saqr 51°56'E 15°32'N and inland to Wadi Sh'hout 50°43'E 16°20'N and Shabwa 47°01'E 15°23'N, at altitudes from just above sea-level to 800m.

Distribution & Comments: Widespread in Arabia and east to southwest Iran. All of the survey observations were in areas of loose sand except at Wadi Sh'hout which consisted of compacted limestone dust. At this locality a positive identification was not made and the species observed could have been *S. doriae*, *S. slevini* or *S. leptocymbotes*.

\* *Stenodactylus yemenensis*

1- Wadi el Kubt (Tihama), 44°23.80'E 13°03.47'N, 460m.

One spot-lighted at night walking across bare, loose sand.

Distribution & Comments: Endemic to southwestern Arabia occurring in coastal western Yemen and southwestern Saudi Arabia.

\* *Tropicolotes scorteccii*

1- 24.4.93, hills inland from Ra's Sharwayn, 51°35'E 15°24'N, 700m.

One under a loose rock on the summit of bare hill covered in fragmented slabs of limestone.

Distribution & Comments: Known only from the Hadhramaut region in Yemen and Dhofar, Oman. This is a tiny gecko not reaching more than 40mm in length from snout to vent.

Family Lacertidae – Lacertid lizards

\*\* *Acanthodactylus arabicus* – Yemen Spiny-footed Lizard

Observed at several localities the most westerly at Wadi El Kubt, 44°21.85'E

13°04.62'N, eastwards to al-Shihr, 49°35'E 14°44'N and at altitudes from just above sea-level to 460m.

Distribution & Comments: Endemic to the Red Sea coast of western Yemen eastwards along the south coast to Qisn. Immatures have a bright green tail and when at rest it is constantly wriggled, perhaps as a predator distraction display.

*Acanthodactylus boskianus* – Spiny-footed Lizard

1- 8.4.93, Wadi Himarah, 46°53'E 14°03'N, 625m.

2- 27.4.93, al-Faydami plain, 52°28'E 16°25'N, < 10m.

3- 3.5.93, al-Sawm, 49°14'E 16°08'N, 800m.

One caught, snout-vent = 79mm tail = 165mm; 10 ventrals

26 dorsals (12 large dorsals, 7 smaller laterals on either flank).

4- 4.5.93, Sayawn, 48°50'E 15°56'N, 830m.

5- 5.5.93, Al Mudhur (Hadramaut), 48°25'E 15°49'N, 790m.

Distribution & Comments: Widespread in Arabia northwards to south-east Turkey and also North Africa. The survey observations suggest that this is a common and widespread species in Yemen at low to medium altitude. It inhabits sandy/gravelly areas with at least some vegetation, and sometimes occurs in cultivated fields with sparse crop cover. This species was undoubtedly encountered at more localities than indicated but possible confusion with *A. felicis/yemenicus* could not be ruled out.

\* *Acanthodactylus opheodurus* – Spiny-footed Lizard

1- 5.5.93, Al Mudhur (Hadramawt), 48°25'E 15°49'N, 790m.

At least ten immatures and three adults.

Distribution & Comments: Widespread in Arabia north to Palestine, Jordan and Iraq. The immatures of this species are characterised by a reddish tail and like *A. arabicus* it is almost constantly wriggled when the animal is at rest.

\* *Mesalina adramitana* ?

1- 2.5.93, 250 km west of al-Ghaydah, approx. 51°08'E 16°15'N, approx. 670m. Three *Mesalina* lizards observed on ground in palmetto (dwarf fan palm) habitat were probably this species.

Distribution & Comments: Known from eastern Yemen, Oman, U.A.E., Qatar and south-east Saudi Arabia. The type locality of this species is in the Hadramaut and the survey record lies within the known range.

**Family Scincidae – Skinks**

*Chalcides ocellatus* – Ocellated Skink

1- 29.3.93, Wadi Hajr (1km N. of road), 48°41.33'E 14°05.66'N, 30m.

One in *Acacia* undergrowth, retreated down burrow when disturbed.

2- 7.4.93, Wadi Hajr (4km N. of road), 48°42'E 14°07'N, 30m.

One on embankment alongside irrigation ditch and *Sorghum* field, retreated down burrow when disturbed.

Distribution & Comments: Occurs in North Africa, parts of Mediterranean Europe, Asia Minor eastwards to Pakistan. In Arabia it is mainly found in coastal localities especially in cultivated areas where the ground is often damp, as was the habitat at Wadi Hajr.

*Mabuya brevicollis*

1- 28-29.4.93, Wadi Mararah, 52°55'E 16°39'N, 360m.

Several observed amongst leaf-litter in dry scrubby areas and one basking on a rock one morning at 07.00hrs.

Distribution & Comments: North-east Africa, peripheral Arabia from Taif (Saudi Arabia) To Dhofar, Oman, eastern U.A.E. and coastal Pakistan.

\* *Mabuya tessellata*

1- 23.3.93, Jebel Iraf, 44°15.31'E 13°07.02'N, 1200m.

Two skinks (approx. 15-20cm total length, bronzy-buff dorsum slightly more rufous tail, dark line running from nostril through eye and ending above forelimb) observed on boulders. Neither animals were caught and a positive identification was not possible but they were probably *M.tessellata*.

2- 2.5.93, 5km E of Fugamah, 49°27'E 16°10'N, approx, 670m.

One immature found dead under rock (positively identified by Dr. E.N. Arnold, B.M.N.H.).

Distribution & Comments: Occurs in Yemen, Dhofar and northern Oman.

\* *Scincus mitranus mitranus*

1- 28.3.93, Wadi Hajr, 44°41.33'E 14°05.66'N, 30m.

Dessicated head and left forefoot found on sand dune.

2- 29.3.93, Wadi Hajr, 44°41.33'E 14°05.66'N, 30m.

Dessicated body (with tail missing) found on sand dune.

Distribution & Comments: Widespread in south and east Saudi Arabia the Gulf states, Oman and eastern Yemen.



\* *Scincus scincus conirostris* ?

1-22.4.93, Wadi Masilah, 51°08'E 15°14'N, approx. 50m.

One observed wriggling across loose sand. An attempt to catch it caused it to dive rapidly beneath the surface of the sand and it could not be relocated. It had a pale buff dorsum, orange flanks. It was probably *S. scincus* but a positive identification could not be made.

Distribution & Comments: *S. scincus* is found throughout much of the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq and south-west Iran. In Yemen the subspecies *S.s. conirostris* is known from the Hadramawt (Hadhramaut) region.

**Family Varanidae – Monitor lizards**

*Varanus griseus* – Desert Monitor

1-20.4.93, near Qa'wah, approx. 44°25'E 12°42'N, 50m.

One immature approx. 60cm long running off quickly across sand and taking refuge in burrow when disturbed.

2- 22.4.93, Wadi Masilah, 51°08'E 15°14'N, approx. 50m.

One on sand dunes with some scattered stands of *Calotropis procera*.

3- 1.5.93, 61km west of al-Ghaydah, approx 51°35'E 16°13'N, 260m.

One adult observed retreating down burrow when approached.

4- 5.5.93, 2km east of Al Mudhur, 48°25'E 15°49'N, 790m.

One immature in habitat consisting of flat, sandy, dry abandoned/fallow fields with scattered low xerophytic shrubs.

5- 6.5.93, 10km south-west of Wadi Shabwa, 47°00'E 15°22'N, 800m.

One adult running rapidly across sand dunes.

Distribution & Comments: Widespread in Arabia and also occurs in north Africa and south-west Asia. In Yemen they are caught locally (but probably not to any great degree) by Bedou tribes people for food.

The habitat at all localities was characteristically arid, fairly flat, sandy and sparsely vegetated.

**Sub-order Serpentes – Snakes**

Twenty eight species of snake have been recorded on mainland Yemen (plus one species of sea-snake). However the validity of the occurrence of seven of these species is open to some speculation as localities where specimens were collected may be erroneous or in some cases they may have been misidentified.

During the OSME survey five species of snake were identified on the Yemen mainland. Several other snakes were observed but poor views meant a positive identification could not be made.

**Family Colubridae – Typical snakes**

*Coluber rhodorachis rhodorachis* – Jan's Desert Racer, Jan's Cliff Racer

1- 26.3.93, Wadi al-Jahr, 46°23.50'E 13°58.20'N, 600m.

One immature found trapped in an empty oil drum sunken into ground (presumably an old fire place/oven). Numerous dead, dessicated immature *Bufo arabicus* were also found in the drum.

Range & Comments: Widespread in Arabia in rocky montane areas. Also found from Libya eastwards to Pakistan and northern India. It is a diurnal or crepuscular species and is very fast moving.

\* *Coluber thomasi* – Thomas' Snake

1- 28.4.93, Wadi Mararah, 52°55'E 16°39'N, 360m.

One observed at about mid-day in a small *Acacia nilotica* tree approx. 4m in height, where it sought refuge in a hollow in the trunk.

Range & Comments: Endemic to the coastal plains and mountains of the Dhofar area of Yemen and Oman. The survey record lies within the known range but represents only the second Yemen record. Little is known about this micro-colubrid and there are few records. It may however be quite common and the paucity of records simply a reflection of the lack of herpetologists visiting this region.

*Psammodphis schokari schokari* – Sand Snake, Tree Snake

1- 14.4.93, Mahwit, approx. 43°36'E 15°33'N, 700m.

One dead by path (killed by local villagers) near valley bottom.

2- 29.4.93, base of Wadi Mararah, 52°55'E 16°37'N, 30m.

One crossing coast road.

Range & Comments: A widespread species in Arabia occurring also throughout North Africa eastwards to north-west India. The survey record from Wadi Mararah represents a substantial (although not unexpected) eastward extension to its known range in Yemen. It has mildly toxic venom.

*Telescopus dhara dhara* – Cat Snake

1- 22.3.93, Jebel Iraf, 44°15.31'E 13°07.02'N, 1400m.

One spot-lighted after dark on ground in open *Juniperus* dominated woodland.

Range & Comments: Widespread on the Arabian Peninsula but distributed mostly in the montane periphery to about 29°N. It occurs throughout most of Yemen. A separate subspecies *T.d. obtusus* is found throughout much of north and north-east Africa. A nocturnal, back-fanged snake with mildly toxic venom.

Family Viperidae – Vipers

\**Echis coloratus* – Saw-scaled Viper, Carpet Viper

1- 28.3.93, Bir Ali, 48°19.50'E 14°0.50'N, < 30m.

A dark individual found in a small burial chamber amongst basaltic rock approx. 200m from coastline.

2- 1.5.93, Wadi Sh'hout, 50°43'E 16°20'N, 800m.

One spot-lighted after dark (20.30 hrs) side-winding across loose sand.

Range & Comments: A near Arabian endemic occurring outside the region in north-east Egypt. The record from Wadi Sh'hout represents an easterly (but not unexpected) range extension in Yemen. This species moves almost entirely by side-winding and is extremely venomous.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Dr E.N. Arnold (British Museum, Natural History) for help in species identification/confirmation of some reptiles from slides upon my return and to Peter W. Hopkins (Estacion Biologica de Doñana) for useful information on sources of reference material.

## REFERENCES

- Arnold, E.N. (1986). New Species of Semaphore Gecko (*Pristurus*: Gekkonidae) from Arabia and Socotra. *Fauna of Saudi Arabia* **8**, 352-377.
- Arnold, E.N. (1986). A Key and Annotated Checklist to the Lizards and Amphisbaenians of Arabia. *Fauna of Saudi Arabia* **8**, 385-435.
- Arnold, E.N. (1993). Historical changes in the ecology and behaviour of semaphore geckos (*Pristurus*: Gekkonidae) and their relatives. *J.Zool., Lond.* **229**, 353-384.
- Gallagher, M. (1990). *Snakes of the Arabian Gulf and Oman*, 2nd ed. Mazoon Printing Press, Oman.
- Gasperetti, J. (1988). Snakes of Arabia. *Fauna of Saudi Arabia*, **9**, 169-399.
- Groombridge, B. (1983). *World Checklist of Threatened Amphibians and Reptiles*, 3rd ed. Nature Conservancy Council, London.
- Hellenius, D. & Gasperetti, J. (1984). The Chameleons of Saudi Arabia. *Fauna of Saudi Arabia* **6**, 513-526.
- Leviton, A.E., Anderson, S.C. Adler, K. & Minton, A. (1992). *Handbook to Middle East Reptiles and Amphibians*. Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles, Ohio, USA.