

**A SECOND RECORD OF THE SMALL-EYED FILE-SNAKE,
MEHELIA STENOPTALMA (MOCQUARD, 1887)
(REPTILIA: SERPENTES: COLUBRIDAE) IN UGANDA**

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ABSTRACT

A second record of *Mehelya stenoptalma* in Uganda, in the lowland rainforest in the Semuliki River National Park is simultaneously a report on the largest known specimen (total length 76.1 cm) until now. Some of its morphological features as well as the etymology of the species name is presented and discussed here.

INTRODUCTION

In August 1994, a short research trip to the recently founded Semuliki Walley National Park (extreme west of Uganda) was undertaken by the authors. The aim of the one-week stay in the Park was to make basic herpetological research there. The area is very interesting from the faunistical point of view, because of its geographical position east of the Ruwenzori Mts., at the eastern margin of the Congo basin. Eastern- and Central-African faunistic elements meet there and form therefore unique cenoses. The reptile fauna of this region is extremely rich.

RESULTS

On the night of the 24 August 1996, an adult female specimen of *Mehelya stenoptalma* was found freshly killed at night, just next to the headquarters of the Semuliki Walley National Park at Ntandi, on the floor of the secondary rainforest. The specimen is now deposited at the "Zoologisches Forschungsinstitut und Museum A. Koenig, Bonn, FRG" under the collection number SFMK 63073. This snake is recorded for the second time in Uganda – except for Pitman (1974), who considered it a "rare forest species" and mentioned one specimen from Mingani (Kibale Forest), no literature record of this snake from Ugandan territory has been published yet.

Mehelya stenoptalma is an ophiophagous, terrestrial, and probably partly burrowing rainforest snake, which is widely distributed in Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Congo, Togo, Zaire and Western Uganda, but relatively rare within the whole range (Boulenger 1893, Loveridge 1939, Pitman 1974, De Witte 1962). Thanks to its secretive lifestyle and rareness, its biology is generally poorly known.

Some data taken from the collected specimen are presented here. Total length: 76.1 cm, tail length: 9.3 cm. It is the longest known specimen, as the previously longest one, originating from the type of series of Mocquard, was only 70 cm long. The head is clearly distinct from neck, depressed, rostrum rounded, with small eyes and large, round nostrils. Rostral is more than twice as broad as long, barely visible from above. 7 upper



Plate 1. *Mehelya stenoptakma* from Ntandi, Semuliki National Park, eastern Uganda



Plate 2. Secondary forest near Ntandi, Semuliki National Park, eastern Uganda – habitat of *Mehelya stenoptakma*

labials, 3rd and 4th entering the orbit, 8 lower labials, 1 preocular, 1 postocular, 1+2 temporals; supraocular and parietal shields are large, loreal tiny. Length of the frontal is equal to its width. Body scales are smooth, hexagonal, all of about the same size, except for the slightly enlarged vertebral row of scales, which are weakly bicarinate. There are 15 midbody scale rows, 214 and 45/46+1 (paired) subcaudals; the anal shield is entire. The colour is uniformly glossy blackish above, each dorsal scale with a whitish edge, cream to white below. The ventrals have laterally a grey spot on each side, of the same size as neighbouring dorsal scales. Lower labials are speckled with blackish. Terminal third of tail is blackish above and below. The presented morphological features are in accordance with the data published by Boulenger (1893), Loveridge (1939), Mocquard (1887) and Pitman (1974).

ETYMOLOGICAL NOTE

The grammatical gender of the genus- and species-name must be in accordance, due to the International Rules of Zoological Nomenclature. The snake genus *Mehelya* Csiki, 1903, named in honour of the famous hungarian zoologist L. MEHELKY, is of feminine gender. Mocquard described this species in 1887 as *Heterolepis stenoptalmus*, the type originating from Assini, Gold Coast. The species name is derived from Greek and means "small eyed". If the species name of the Small-Eyed File-Snake is formed as an adjective, it must be spelled as "*stenoptalma*" instead of "*stenoptalmus*", when belonging to the genus *Mehelya*.

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