
Mabuya aurata septemtaeniata (Family, Scincidae): first record for the United Arab Emirates

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THE Golden Skink *Mabuya aurata septemtaeniata* has a geographical distribution which is recorded as northeast Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, northern Oman (Muscat), Iraq, Iran and Massawa in Eritrea (Arnold, 1986). This species also occurs in Qatar, where its distribution is recorded in a book on Qatar's herpetofauna by El-Sherif & Al-Thani (2000). The recent record of this species from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (collected 15th June 2004) is a new distribution record for the UAE. As per Hornby (1996) the UAE has a total of 67 species of amphibians and reptiles with the Family Scincidae being represented by five species, namely Asian snake-eyed skink *Ablepharus pannonicus* (Lichenstein, 1923), Ocellated skink *Chalcides ocellatus* (Forskål, 1775), Tesselated mabuya *Mabuya tessellate* (Anderson 1895), Sand fish *Scincus mitranus* (Anderson, 1871) and *Scincus scincus conirostris* (Blanford, 1881). The new record increases this number to six.

A herpetological survey of offshore islands is being conducted by the Terrestrial Environment Research Center (TERC) of the Environmental Research & Wildlife Development Agency (ERWDA) of Abu Dhabi. So far, the survey has recorded a total of five species of geckos, one lizard and three species of snake from offshore islands of the Abu Dhabi Emirates (Soorae, 2004). During a routine survey on 24th April 2004, a skink was observed at 09:15 hrs on Jernain Island (24.92791°N, 52.85328°E) in some irrigated, heavily vegetated creepers at approximately 2 m above sea-level and approximately 20 m away from the shoreline. The following two days were spent observing this species, but attempts to obtain

a specimen for positive identification was not possible. A specimen was finally obtained on 15th June 2004 and after further study was confirmed as the Golden skink, *Mabuya aurata septemtaeniata* (Reuss, 1834), a species not previously recorded for UAE.

This species was identified using keys developed by Arnold (1986) and Leviton *et al.* (1992). To confirm the identification of this species detailed photographs were also sent to José Rosado, Curatorial Associate in Herpetology, Department of Herpetology, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA who confirmed its identification with specimens in their collection (Rosado, pers. comm.).

The main identifying characters as per Arnold (1986) are the presence of three keels on the dorsal scales, and the lack of contact between the first supraocular scale and the frontal scale on the dorsal surface of the head. The species also has a pattern of dark stripes on its foreparts and light dorsolateral streaks along the body. Leviton *et al.* (1992) also mention that the prefrontal scales are not in contact. The scale patterns mentioned in these two keys conform exactly to the specimen collected. The specimen collected has the following dimensions: snout to vent length 7.3 cm, tail length 9 cm, body diameter of approximately 1.5 cm and a total body length of approximately - 16.3 cm. This particular specimen was found in the vicinity of the main guest house on Jernain Island (approx. 6 km²) where it uses an irrigated planted creeper (mat-forming, yellow flowering composite – Asteraceae – with dense foliage) as a hiding place. It was observed leaving this planted

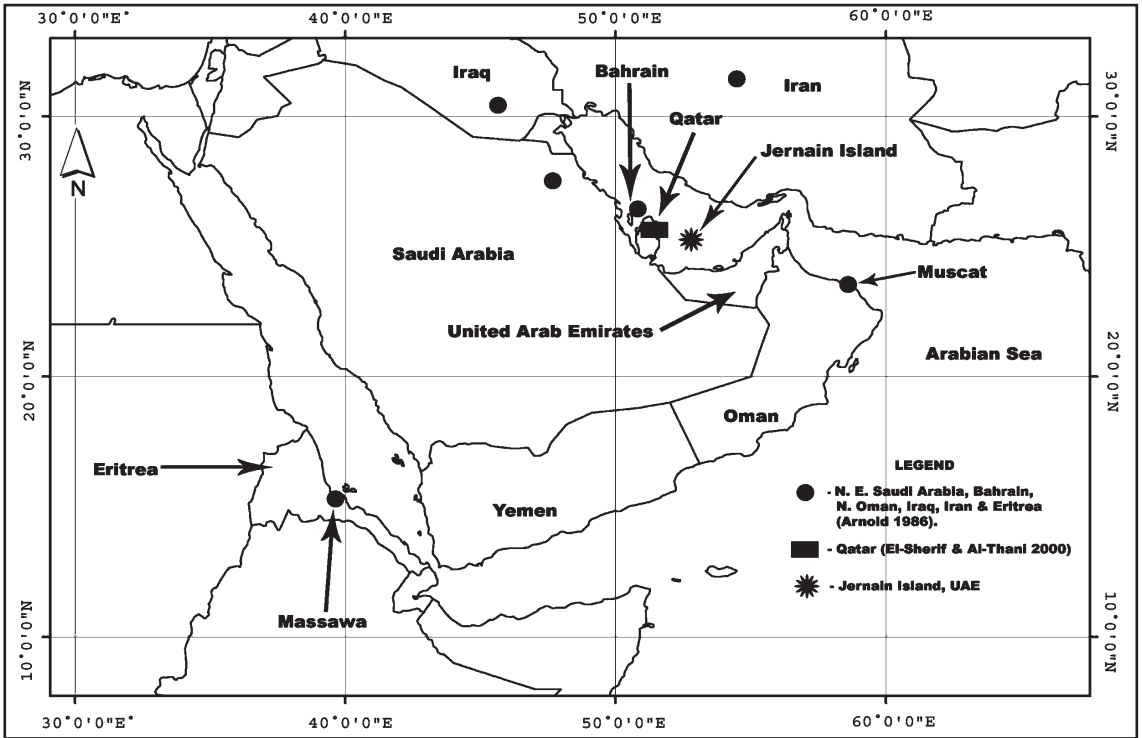


Figure 1. Distribution of *Mabuya aurata septemtaeniata* in the Arabian Peninsula and neighbouring countries.

creeper to actively hunt around some planted trees nearby and also use stones as basking places during the day. They were very alert and upon approaching a specimen it would immediately move off and flee to the safety of the planted creeper for refuge. This made them extremely difficult to catch and a specimen was finally obtained by using rodent-capture glue put on a cardboard piece left near a spot where these skinks were seen frequently passing.

As shown in Figure 1 Jernain island seems like a range extension of this species distribution from northeast Saudi Arabia, Qatar and now Jernain Island, UAE, which may be the limit of its southern geographical range. Arnold (1986) considers the Muscat, Oman and Massawa, Eritrea populations to be accidental introductions. The fact that this species has only been found on one island amongst a total of 13 surveyed during a herpetological survey in 2003–2004 (Soorae, 2004) may also be the result of an accidental introduction.

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