

### Short Note

*Mabuya brauni hildae* Loveridge, 1953 considered a synonym of *M. brauni* Tornier, 1902 (Sauria: Scincidae)

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### Introduction

In 1902 Tornier described a new scincid lizard and named it *Mabuya brauni*. The description was based on one subadult specimen collected by Dr. Fülleborn in the Ukinga mountains in the South-Western part of Tanganyika, the present Tanzania.

Thirty years later, Loveridge, collecting in the same area, tried in vain to obtain more specimens. He considered *M. brauni* to be a subspecies of *M. varia* Peters, 1867 (Loveridge, 1933). In 1948 when he was collecting on the Nyika plateau in Nyassaland, the present Malawi, Loveridge caught eight scincid lizards which he described as a new species: *M. hildae* (Loveridge, 1953). In the same publication he suggests that this newly described species might be related to *M. brauni*, of which he thinks that it might be a race of *M. bocagii* Boulenger, 1897 rather than of *M. varia* Peters. Later in his "Check list of the reptiles and amphibians of East-Africa" (Loveridge, 1957), he again regarded *M. brauni* Tornier as a subspecies of *M. varia* Peters. More recently eight additional *hildae* were collected on the Nyika plateau by Broadly (1977). In his paper on the *M. striata* complex he treats *hildae* as a subspecies of *M. brauni*.

In November 1977 I collected on the mountain "Loleza" near Mbeya, Tanzania, a scincid lizard that corresponded to the description of *M. b. hildae* (Meerman, 1979). In 1980 I managed to collect an additional four specimens in the same locality, these, however, either answered the description of *M. brauni* Tornier, or that of *M. hildae* Loveridge. All five specimens have been deposited in the Rijksmuseum voor Natuurlijke Historie, Leiden, The Netherlands. (RMNH 19043, 20377-20380).

### Taxonomical remarks

*Mabuya b. brauni* Tornier and *M. b. hildae* Loveridge are most readily distinguished from their relatives within the *Mabuya striata* complex by their having only a poorly defined or absent median keel on the dorsal scales, thus causing the dorsals to be bicarinate. Another important character is the number of lamellae beneath the fourth finger and fourth toe. In *M. b. hildae* the number of Lamellae beneath the fourth finger ranges from

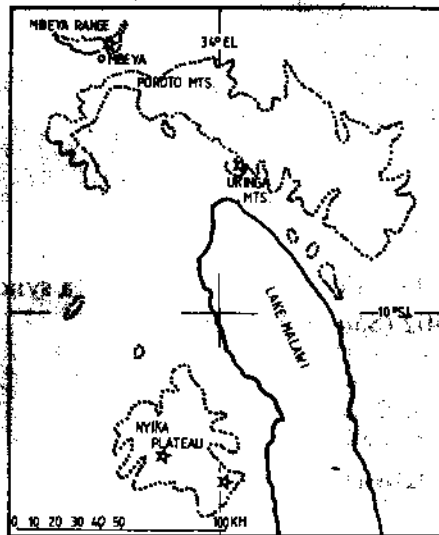


Fig. 1. Map of the area where *M. brauni* has so far been found, the 2,000 m. contour line has been indicated. ☆: localities for *M. brauni*.

11-14 (mean 12.6), while in the other species of the *striata* complex the number ranges from 14-20. Under the fourth toe the mean number of lamellae is also lower than in any other species of the complex, in *M. b. hildae* the range is 14-20 (mean 16.6), in *M. b. brauni* 17 (n=1). In the other species the number ranges from 15-26 (Broadley, 1977).

The subspecies *M. b. brauni* Tornier and *M. b. hildae* Loveridge are separated on the basis of a single character: The subocular bordering the lip (in *brauni*), or being separated from it by supralabials (in *hildae*). All five specimens answer to most of the above mentioned criteria, with exception of RMNH 19043 which has 17 lamellae beneath the fourth finger, but they all disagree on the point of the suboculars. In exactly half the number of sides the subocular borders the lip, in the other half it is separated from the lip by supralabials. In this point the Mbeya population seems to be intermediate between *M. b. brauni* Tornier and *M. b. hildae* Loveridge, judging from their respective descriptions.

Summary of taxonomic characters of the Mbeya specimens (RMNH 19043, 20377-20380): Dorsal scales bicarinate, sometimes tricarinate especially on the nape. Dorsocaudals tri- to hexacarinate. Subcaudals and ventrals smooth. Soles spinose, subdigital lamellae keeled. Lamellae under the fourth finger: 12 (n=1); 13 (n=3) and 17 (n=1). Lamellae under the fourth toe: 15 (n=2); 16 (n=2) and 18 (n=1). Midbody scale rows: 38 (n=2); 39 (n=2) and 40 (n=1). Prefrontals separated. Supralabials anterior to suboculars: 4 (one side); 5 (seven sides) and 6 (two sides). Both suboculars reaching the lip in two specimens (RMNH 20377, 20378), not reaching it in two others (RMNH 19043, 20379), in one specimen reaching the lip on the left side, not reaching it on the right. (RMNH 20380). Supranasals in contact. Supraciliaries 5 (eight sides) or 6 (two sides). Ear lobules: 2 (n=1) and 3 (n=4). Length (body + tail in mm): 49+65; 50+66; 70+49; 46+49; 75+90 (Last one after one year in captivity). Colour: Dorsum olive brown with light vertebral line and dorso-lateral line. Numerous small pale spots, both on dorsum and on flanks. Venter: Chin and throat grey or nearly black, head dark, ventrals white to grey.

## Conclusions

Of course the available material is too small in number to reach any definite conclusions regarding the status of the Mbeya specimens. But it seems that they are completely comparable with the Ukinga specimen, and the only difference with the Nyika specimens is that in the latter the subocular is excluded from the lip by supralabials in all specimens. On the basis of these taxonomic features it seems doubtful whether *hildae* Loveridge any longer deserves subspecific status. Therefore I suggest, as long as no further Tanzanian material to prove differently becomes available, to consider *M. hildae* Loveridge as a synonym of *M. brauni* Tornier, which is no longer subdivided in two geographically separated subspecies.

Under the present climatic conditions it seems unlikely that the Mbeya population is still in contact with the Nyika and Ukinga populations, since the area between them is less mountainous, and for the major part lower than 2000 and partly even lower than 1500 m. Even though the Ukinga mountains and the Mbeya range are nearly linked together by the Poroto mountains. In geologically recent times however, when vegetation belts on African mountains were considerably depressed (Moreau, 1963), contact between the respective populations seems to be obvious.

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