

A study on cave-dwelling geckos in Iraq, with the description of a new species from Saffine mountain

(Reptilia: Gekkonidae)

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Abstract. Seven species of gekkonid lizards were found in caves in northern Iraq (Kurdistan province), including a new species, *Asaccus saffinae* sp. n. An identification key for *Asaccus* species in Iraq is also presented. *Ptyodactylus puiseuxi* has been found in Iraq for the first time.

Key words. *Asaccus*, Kurdistan, Iraq, Middle East, gekkonid lizards.

Introduction

There are many caves in the Kurdistan mountains of Iraq as well as in the western and southern deserts. Most of these caves are dry, but some have a high humidity and water is available inside. A number of species of animals and plants live permanently or temporarily in these caves, in the depths or near the opening of the cave. These include bats, blind fish and arthropods in the deep parts, while lizards, birds and plants are found near the opening. Each cave has a specific ecosystem depending on size, humidity, altitude and temperature. Several of these caves were occupied by humans during prehistoric times. We found for example a Stone Age painting in Daray Mar Cave near Sargat Village from approximately 30,000 years ago.

Geckos are among the common cave-dwelling animals. During this study we collected several species of gecko from different caves in different parts of Iraq and studied their taxonomy and habitats. The present study does not cover all caves, but is part of a wider project supported by the Baghdad University and the Salahaden University of Irbil.

In this study we used photographs and material collected by the authors. For the identification and comparison of the material, we worked in the collection of the Natural History Museum of Baghdad University. The caves covered by this study are located in the areas of Sulaymaniah (Hazar Merd, Sargat-Daray Mar Cave, Palagawrah), Erbil (Shera Swar), South Mosul Sadam Cave, in the western desert (Hadetha and Rawa, Aloos) and from Om Al Jadoa Cave, north Heat. The comparative material that we studied in the Natural History Museum of Baghdad University was collected from Baghdad, Diala and Anbar.

Results and discussion

Genus *Asaccus* Dixon & S. Anderson, 1973

This genus was known from a single species *Asaccus elisae* (Werner, 1895) (KHALAF 1959, WEBER 1960, HAAS 1952, NADER & JAWDAT 1976) until 1973, when DIXON & ANDERSON (1973) discovered a new taxon and named it *Asaccus griseonotus* based on the absence of