

New insights in the taxonomy of the Persian Sand Gecko, *Tropiocolotes persicus* (Nikolsky, 1903)

(Sauria: Gekkonidae)

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Abstract. Morphological examination of six specimens of *Tropiocolotes persicus* (Nikolsky, 1903) collected from two new localities in southern Iran has shed new light on the taxonomy of this enigmatic species. Detailed morphological examination of the specimens revealed the presence of ontogenetic change in the dorsal pattern of the specimens. The specimens also show a combination of morphological characters from various subspecies of *T. persicus*, and raise important questions about their validity. The taxonomy of *Tropiocolotes persicus* is discussed.

Key words. Taxonomy, morphology, ontogenetic changes, distribution, habitat, Iran, Middle East.

Introduction

Alsophylax persicus was described by NIKOLSKY in 1903 based on a single specimen collected by N. ZARUDNY in south-eastern Iran. The species was later placed in the genus *Tropiocolotes* Peters, 1880. Detailed morphological descriptions are given in SZCZERBAK & GOLUBEV (1996), ANDERSON (1999), GUIBÉ (1966) and RASTEGAR-POUYANI et al. (2007).

So far, three subspecies of *Tropiocolotes persicus* have been described. The nominate subspecies *T. p. persicus* (Nikolsky, 1903), from south-eastern Iran and adjacent areas in Pakistan, is identified by the following key characters: the first pair of postmentals separated from each other by a gular scale or having a narrow contact, the width of dorsal and caudal crossbars narrower than half width of the interspaces, and the dorsal crossbars possessing a light posterior edge (SZCZERBAK & GOLUBEV 1996). The type locality is “Vikus Degak in terra Dizak, Persia orientalis” (SZCZERBAK & GOLUBEV 1996). Dizak Village is situated 30 km south-west of Mirjaveh, Sistan & Baluchestan, and the co-ordinates are 28°58'N, 61°12'E. The meaning of “Vikus deghak” (or “Dehal” as ANDERSON 1999 states) is not clear. The subspecies *T. p. bakhtiari* (Minton, Anderson & Anderson, 1970), described from Khuzestan Province around Masjed-Soleiman (31°57'N, 45°21'E), is characterised by the first pair of postmentals broadly in contact with each other, the width of the dorsal and caudal crossbars larger than the width of the interspaces, and the absence of white edges. Finally, the subspecies *T. p. euphorbiacola* (Minton, Anderson & Anderson, 1970), from southern Pakistan and adjacent areas in northwest India (AGARWAL 2007), is characterised by the combination of the following features: first pair of postmentals broadly in contact, dorsal crossbars equal or slightly narrower than the interspaces but always more than half the width of this interspaces (SZCZERBAK & GOLUBEV 1996). Pholidosis differences of *Tropiocolotes persicus* spp. are summarised in Table 2.