

First record of the Rat Snake, *Zamenis hohenackeri* (Strauch, 1873), from north-eastern Iraq with notes on other colubrid snakes

(Reptilia: Colubridae)

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Abstract. The Rat Snake, *Zamenis hohenackeri* (Strauch, 1873), was found at the foot of Hawraman Mountain and at Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan, which represents the first country record. The Racer subspecies *Platyceps rhodorachis ladacensis* (Anderson, 1871) was recorded for the first time in Iraq and the Montpellier Snake, *Malpolon insignitus* (Geoffroy, 1827), was found with a rare colour pattern.

Key words. *Platyceps*, *Zamenis*, *Malpolon*, Hawraman, Khormal, Kurdistan.

Introduction

In the course of a herpetological survey programme conducted by the Iraq Natural History Museum of the University of Baghdad and the Biology Department and Museum of Natural History of Salahadien University of Erbil, we found three remarkable snakes one of which was new to Iraq.

Zamenis hohenackeri (Strauch, 1873)

Elaphe hohenackeri Strauch, 1873

Material: 2 juvenile ♀ (Fig. 1a), 34-35.EMNH, collected by Subhan H. MOHAMMAD and Barham S. AHMAD, 20.v.2010 from Hanay Den village, city of Khormal, in the lowest zone of Hawraman Mountain (Halabjah province in Iraqi Kurdistan), altitude 900 m a.s.l. – 1 adult female (Fig. 1b), 40.EMNH, collected by Sarbaz I. MOHAMMAD, 20.IV.2011 from Choman village north of Erbil, altitude 1,000 m a.s.l. The material is deposited at EMNH (Erbil Museum of Natural History).

Diagnosis and measurements: Head distinct from neck. Pupil of the eye round. Snout-vent length 40-40.5-46 cm, tail length 8.5-9.0 cm, 23-24 rows of smooth dorsal scales with single pit and the scales with white edges except that of the dark spots. 3 of 7 dorsal scales little larger than the other dorsal scales, in contact with parietals. A few scales near the vent feebly keeled. Ventral without keel. 209-226 ventrals and 62-54 subcaudal scales. 8 upper labials, 4th and 5th in contact with the eye. Nostrils between two scales and suture of inter nasals. Loreal longer than deep. One pre- and two post-oculars, 3-9 enlarged temporal scales. Anterior pair of chin shields in contact. Anal plate divided.

Colour pattern (specimens preserved in formalin): Belly, throat and subcaudal region blackish-brown or dark brown, the melanistic colour of the ventrals interrupted and interspersed with white spots. Dorsum ochre or bright brown, with 70 irregular large blotches in