

**NEW LOCAL AND REGIONAL RECORDS FOR
LIOPHIS POECILOGYRUS SCHOTTI (SCHLEGEL,
1837) IN VENEZUELA**

- Taxonomy / *Taxonomía*
 Biogeography / *Biogeografía*
 Ecology / *Ecología*
 Natural History / *Historia Natural*

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Within the family Colubridae, the genus *Liophis* Wagler, 1830, evidences a high diversity, with about 41 species inhabiting Central and South America, with the higher species richness in the late region. Thirteen species of *Liophis* have been reported for Venezuela (Dixon 1989, La Marca 1997, Kornacker 1999, Fuentes and Barrios 1999, Esqueda *et al.* 2007). They are snakes having a small to moderate body (between 500 and 1500 mm in total length) and cylindrical head differentiated from the body, tail from moderate to long (13 to 31% of total length) and smooth dorsal scales. They are basically terrestrial although some are cryptozoic and others are semiaquatic. Due to the great quantity of species within the group, they could occupy ecosystems such diverse as grasslands and savannas, tropical dry forests, transitional forests, cloud forests and even paramos. Along its range of distribution this genus reaches altitudes from sea level to 3500 meters in elevation (Dixon 1980); in Venezuela they are found from sea level to nearly 2600 m a.s.l. (Lancini 1982, La Marca and Soriano 2004).

Liophis poecilogyrus (Wied, 1825) has a wide distribution in South America that includes Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina (Dixon 1989, Dixon and Markezich 1992). In Venezuela, *Liophis poecilogyrus schotti* (Schlegel, 1837) has been reported south of the Orinoco River in the Amazonas and Bolívar States (Dixon and Markezich 1992, Fuentes and Barrio 1999, Rivas *et al.* 2002).

During January 2007, a specimen of *L. poecilogyrus schotti* was collected and photographed (Fig. 1), in the installations of the Biological Station of Sincor Company, 20 Km southwest of San Diego de Cabrutica, Municipio Monagas, Anzoátegui State (8°28'N, 64°53' W; 160 m elevation). This specimen represents the first State record North to the Orinoco River, with a range extension of about 289 Km NE of the closest known locality (savannas at El Manteco, Bolívar State; cf. Fuentes and Barrio 1999). The predominant vegetation at the site is an ecotone between a forested savanna and a gallery forest. The specimen was observed moving actively on the floor of the Biological Station between 08:30 and 09:00 hours.

Our specimen is a juvenile, unsexed specimen of about 230 mm in total length, having the following lepidosis: supralabials 8(4/5), infralabials 10 (the first five in contact with the anterior dorsals), 1/1 preoculars, 2/2 postoculars, nasals divided, loreal present, 1+2 temporals, 19-15 dorsal scale rows with apical pits, 159 ventrals and 38 subcaudals (tip of the tail was mutilated).

We watched other individuals of this snake in two additional places. The first is coming from Castillero, Caicara del Orinoco, Municipio Manuel Cedeño (ca. 7°38'N and 66°10' W), Bolívar State, which widens the local distribution to 274 Km northeast of the closest known locality, Puerto Ayacucho, Amazonas State (Rivas *et al.* 2002). The second comes from Zaraza (9° 21'N, 65° 19' W), Municipio Pedro Zaraza, Guárico State. This specimen is the first voucher known from the State, and extends known distribution 377 km NE of the closest locality, savannas at El Manteco, Bolívar State (Fuentes and Barrio 1999) and 482 km NE Puerto Ayacucho, Amazonas State (Rivas *et al.* 2002). These data reveal that this species is more widely distributed in the Venezuelan lowlands ("Los Llanos") than previously reported.

All the specimens in Caicara del Orinoco were observed active on the ground during the coolest hours of the day, during the rainy season, specially in forested savannas or intervened- and- forested areas.



FIG. 1. Juvenile of *Liophis poecilogyrus schotti*. Specimen not collected. Photo by M. Natera-Mumaw.

Juvenil de *Liophis poecilogyrus schotti*. Ejemplar no coleccionado. Foto por M. Natera-Mumaw.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thanks James R. Dixon, Enrique La Marca and Dinora Sánchez for reviewing an earlier version of the manuscript, and to two anonymous reviewers for their additional comments. Linda Mumaw assisted with translation to English from a Spanish version.

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Recibido / Received 15 MAR 2007
Aceptado / Accepted 23 APR 2007