

NOTA

THE PROPER NAME FOR THE VENEZUELAN RED-TAILED CORAL SNAKE

EL NOMBRE CORRECTO DE LA CORAL COLA ROJA VENEZOLANA

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ABSTRACT

Micrurus mipartitus rozei subsp. nov. is proposed for the taxon currently known as *M. m. semipartitus* (Jan, 1858), an unjustified emendation of *Elaps mipartitus* Duméril et al. 1854.

RESUMEN

Se propone *Micrurus mipartitus rozei* subsp. nov. para la subespecie antes conocido como *M. m. semipartitus* (Jan 1858), una emendación injustificada de *Elaps mipartitus* Duméril et al. 1854.

Keywords: Reptilia, Serpentes, Elapidae, *Micrurus mipartitus*, nomenclature, systematics

Palabras clave: Reptilia Serpentes, Elapidae, *Micrurus mipartitus*, nomenclatura, Sistemática

The name *Elaps semipartitus* was first proposed by Jan (1858), without any distinctive description. In that work, diagnoses in a key-like arrangement were given for the genus *Elaps* and for the various groups of species included in that genus, but nothing for any of the three nominal species in the group containing *E. semipartitus*. The name was attributed to "Dum. Bib.", but with no precise reference. Thus *E. semipartitus* of Jan (1858) is a *nomen nudum*, having no equivalent of a description and no precise reference to such a description.

Jan's intent was clarified in 1863, in which work (p. 113) he listed, again without description, "*E. semipartitus* Dum. e Bibr. Erp. gén. VII. p. 1220". The name *Elaps semipartitus* Jan (1863) became available as of that citation, giving "a bibliographic reference to a previously published description" (Art. 12.2.1) of the 1999 International Code of Zoological Nomenclature). Two accounts appeared on the cited page (1220) of Duméril et al (1854): *E. occipitalis* (sp. n.) and *E. mipartitus*

(sp. n.). The former was recognized by Jan (1863: 115) as a valid species from Australia, whereas *E. mipartitus* was not cited anywhere in his exhaustive review of the genus. The only logical conclusion is that *E. semipartitus* was proposed as an emendation of *E. mipartitus* Duméril et al. (1854), regarded as a misspelling. It therefore has the same type and type locality as the latter name. There is no evidence that *E. semipartitus* was a lapsus; its consistent spelling over a period of 15 years by Jan (1858, 1863) and by Jan and Sordelli (1872: livr. 42, pl. 2, fig. 1) indicates deliberate emendation. Dr. V. Mahner (MHNG), a current member of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature emphatically agreed that Jan's spelling *semipartitus* should not be interpreted as an *erroneous subsequent spelling*, but rather as an *unjustified emendation*.

Basically the same conclusion was reached independently by the next reviser of the genus, Boulenger (1896), who regarded it as an invalid junior synonym of *Elaps mipartitus* Duméril et al.

(1854). Boulenger's lead was consistently followed in at least 12 other subsequent works up to 1952 (*vide* Roze, 1955) - 56 years of consistency. Nevertheless Roze (1955) adopted Jan's name, apparently upon the recommendation of K.P. Schmidt and/or W. Leslie Burger, for a distinct subspecies, *Micrurus mipartitus semipartitus* (Jan). His explanation was that *Según parece su nombre probablemente es sólo enmienda de E. mipartitus de Duméril y Bibron, pero es el primer nombre usado para la forma del Formenkreis M. mipartitus al este de Colombia, y, por lo tanto, aplicable a la forma venezolana*. Roze's application of Jan's name has consistently been followed to the present time (e.g. Hoge and Romano 1971:231-2; Golay *et al.*, 1993:176; Roze 1996:199).

Jan's name was not proposed, however, for a new species, but simply as an emendation for Duméril *et al.*'s (1854) *Elaps mipartitus*. That fact was made clear in the first, 1863, usage that made the name available, referring to the-specific page in Duméril *et al.* on which *Elaps mipartitus* was described, and which name Jan evidently regarded merely as an error of spelling. Hence Jan obviously regarded his correction of spelling still as Duméril *et al.*'s name.

For whatever reason, Jan changed the name, and never used the name *mipartitus* for which it was substituted, despite the synoptic coverage of his various works, including his 1858 review of the genus. In the section of that account giving descriptions of all new taxa named there, following the initial brief list of names, *Elaps semipartitus* was not mentioned.

Obviously Jan did not consider it as new, but rather as an emendation. Therefore no question exists that his name *semipartitus* was erected as an emendation of *mipartitus* Duméril *et al.*, even though it has been accepted subsequently by numerous authors (following Roze, 1955) as the valid name for something different.

The International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (1999), Art. 33.2, states that: *any demonstrably intentional change in the original spelling of a name other than a mandatory*

change is an emendation. That article distinguishes *justified* and *unjustified* emendations. Jan's name *semipartitus* falls into the latter category, and as such: *is available and it has its own author and date and is a junior objective synonym of the name in its original spelling*.

Therefore *Elaps semipartitus* Jan (1858) is a junior objective synonym of *Elaps mipartitus* Duméril *et al.* (1854), and cannot be applied to any other taxon except by action of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN). The subspecies to which Roze (1955, 1996) applied Jan's name is thus left without a distinctive name, unless the ICZN were to rule for conservation of Jan's name in its present application. We regard such an appeal as unjustified in view of (1) the negligible impact on biological investigation (rare usage, subspecific rank) that a change of name would have; (2) the failure of the name *semipartitus* to meet the usual minimum requirement of 50 years of stability as a valid name; and (3) the overload of more urgent cases already under consideration by the ICZN.

We therefore propose *Micrurus mipartitus rozei*, subsp. nov. (pronounced as though spelled *rozayi*), for the taxon to which Roze (1955, 1996) applied the name *Elaps semipartitus* Jan. The holotype, which served for the critical figure in Jan and Sordelli (1872) and deposited in the Nationaal Natuurhistorisch Museum, Leiden (RMNH 1388), is from Caracas, Venezuela. The new name is not proposed as a *nomen novum* (replacement name) for *Elaps semipartitus*, which as such would, like the latter, be a junior objective synonym of *Elaps mipartitus*.

The patronym here proposed honors Janís Arnold Rozé, a legendary humanitarian to whom the scientific world is most indebted for his resolution of the long-vexing taxonomy of coral snakes (1996), but also for many other contributions to tropical biology.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are very grateful for the counsel of Dr. V. Mahnert in categorizing the status of Jan's name *semipartitus*.

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