

A NEW LIZARD RECORD FOR THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Mabuya aurata septemtaeniata (Reuss, 1834)

25th October 2004



TERRESTRIAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH CENTRE
ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH & WILDLIFE DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
P.O. Box 45553
Abu Dhabi

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Introduction

A herpetological survey of offshore islands is being conducted under the Abu Dhabi Baseline Survey program of the Terrestrial Environment Research Center (TERC). During a routine survey on 24th April 2004, a skink was observed at 09:15 hrs at the following GPS location 24.92791° N / 52.85328° E on Jernain Island. The following two days were spent observing this species, but attempts to obtain a specimen for positive identification, was not possible. A specimen was obtained on 15th June 2004 and after further identification it was confirmed as *Mabuya aurata septemtaeniata* (Reuss, 1834), which has not been previously recorded in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and is therefore a new distribution record. The species was identified using identification keys developed by Arnold (1986) and Leviton, A. *et al.* (1992).

Taxonomy

The UAE has a total of 67 species of amphibians and reptiles and out of this the Family Scincidae comprises of 5 species namely, 1) Snake-eyed skink (*Ablepharus pannonicus*), 2) Ocellated skink (*Chalcides ocellatus*), 3) *Mabuya tessellate*, 4) Eastern sand skink (*Scincus mitranus*) and 5) Sandfish (*Scincus scincus conirostris*) (Hornby, 1996). The species discovered on Jernain belongs to the **Family: Scincidae, Genus & Species: *Mabuya aurata sseptemtaeniata***.

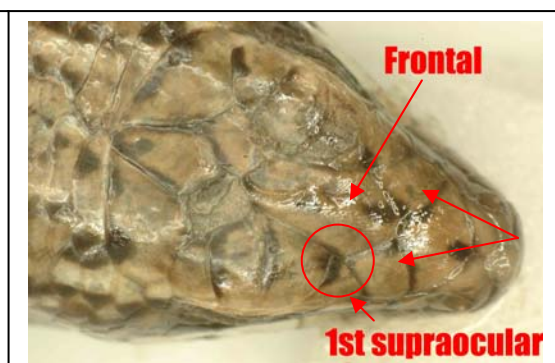
Species Description

The main identifying characters as per Arnold (1986) is the presence of three keels on the dorsal scales and the first supraocular scale contacts the frontal scale on the dorsal surface of the head. The species also has a pattern of dark stripes on foreparts and light dorsolateral streaks along the body.

Fig. 1-A



Fig. 1-B



As can be seen in fig 1-A and 1-B above the characteristic identification marks are shown. Leviton *et al.* (1992) also mentions that the prefrontal scales are not in contact and this also visible above as shown by the 2 arrows in Fig. 1-B..

Fig. 2



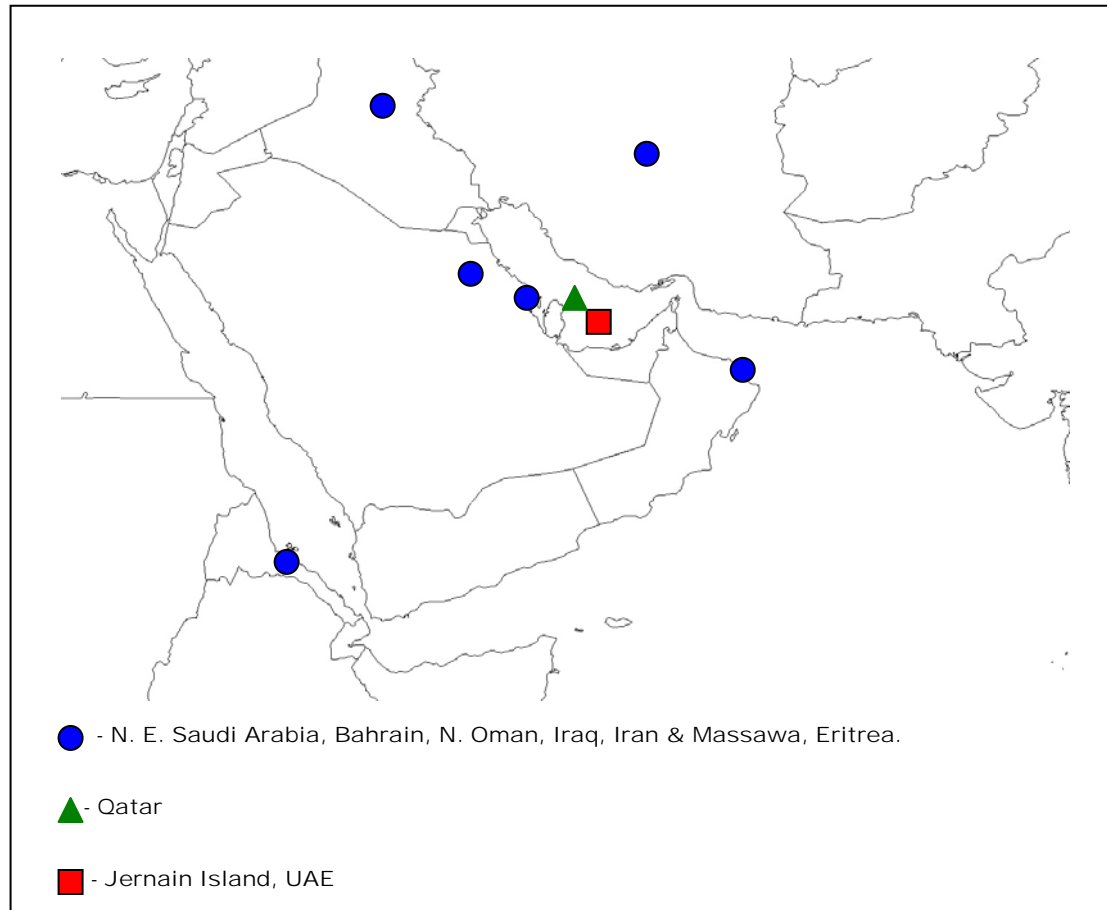
This particular specimen has the following dimensions:

- 1) Snout to vent length of 7.3 cm.
- 2) Tail length of 9 cm.
- 3) Body diameter of approximately 1.5 cm.
- 4) A total body length of approximately 16.3 cm.

To confirm the identification of this species detailed photographs were sent to José Rosado, Curatorial Associate in Herpetology, Department of Herpetology, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA who confirmed the identification of this species with specimens in their collection (pers. comm.).

Species distribution

Fig 3. Distribution records for *Mabuya aurata septemtaeniata*.



Arnold (1986) lists this species distribution from Northeast Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, northern Oman (Muscat), Iraq, Iran and Massawa in Eritrea. El-Sherif & Al-Thani (2000) also list the presence of this species in Qatar. This present record is a new distribution record for the UAE.

Behavioural observations

This species was found in the vicinity of the guest house on Jernain Island where it uses an irrigated planted creeper as a hiding place. It was observed leaving this planted creeper to actively hunt around some planted trees nearby and also use stones as basking places during the day. They were very alert and upon approaching a specimen it would immediately move off and flee to the safety of the planted creeper for refuge. This made them extremely difficult to catch and a specimen was finally obtained by an unconventional trapping method. There is another place on the island which has a similarly planted creeper but even after 2 hours of observation this species was not recorded. Therefore it seems to only occur around the guest house.

Conclusion

A herpetological survey of 13 offshore islands has been conducted in the Abu Dhabi Emirate (Soorae, 2004) and this particular species has only been recorded on Jernain Island. Looking at Fig. 3 there are two possibilities regarding this species distribution in the UAE:

1. As shown in Fig. 3 Jernain island seems like a range extension of this species distribution from N.E. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and now Jernain Island which may be the limit of their range.
2. As mentioned by Arnold (1986) the Muscat, Oman and Massawa, Eritrea populations are considered to be accidental introductions therefore this could be an accidental introduction as we have only recorded one isolated population amongst a host of islands.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Thabit Al Abdessalaam, Director, Marine Environment Research Center (MERC) for facilitating logistics for travel to various islands in the Abu Dhabi Emirate. I would also like to thank MERC staff for assistance in the field and for assistance in capturing a specimen. I would also like to thank Abdul Rab Al Hamiri for assisting in species identification and taking photographs of the specimen.

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