

A NEW SPECIES OF *CTENOTUS* (REPTILIA: SCINCIDAE) FROM CENTRAL AUSTRALIA, AND A KEY TO THE *CTENOTUS LEONHARDII* SPECIES GROUP

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ABSTRACT

A new species of *Ctenotus* Storr (Reptilia:Scincidae), *C. septenarius* sp. nov., from the arid south of the Northern Territory of Australia is described. This species is a member of the *Ctenotus leonhardii* species group (*sensu* Storr *et al.* 1981), and is distinguished from other members of that complex by both scalation and back pattern.

KEYWORDS: Reptilia, Scincidae, *Ctenotus*, new species, Northern Territory, Australia.

INTRODUCTION

The genus *Ctenotus* Storr, 1964 is the largest and most rapidly expanding taxon of scincid lizards found in Australia. It includes 72 species which are distributed throughout the continent and only one of these occurs in New Guinea. *Ctenotus* species are found in a diversity of habitats ranging from sandy deserts to tropical savannah forest. Moreover, numerous examples of microhabitat specialization are known, where sympatrically distributed species exist in subtly differentiated niches (Pianka 1969).

Storr, Smith and Johnstone (1981) recognised 10 separate species groups in *Ctenotus* and these are the *C. labillardieri* group, *C. essingtonii* group, *C. pantherinus* group, *C. grandis* group, *C. rubicundus* group, *C. lesueurii* group, *C. atlas* group, *C. schomburgkii* group, *C. colletti* group and *C. leonhardii* group. Of these, the *C. leonhardii* group was originally composed of 11 species, most of which are found in arid Australia, with a bias in their distribution towards the west of Australia. That is, 9 of these species occur in Western Australia. Since 1981, this species group has been expanded and now includes the following species: *C. alleni* Storr, 1974; *C. gagudju* Sadlier, Wombey and Braithwaite, 1985; *C. greeri* Storr, 1979; *C. hebetior* Storr, 1978; *C. hilli* Storr, 1970; *C. kurnbudj* Sadlier, Wombey and Braithwaite, 1985; *C. leonhardii* (Sternfeld, 1919); *C. militaris* Storr, 1975; *C. mimetes* Storr,

1969; *C. pulchellus* Storr, 1978; *C. regius* Storr, 1971; *C. rutilans* Storr, 1980; *C. serventyi* Storr, 1975; *C. tanamiensis* Storr, 1970; *C. uber* Storr, 1969. A table summarizing the diagnostic characteristics of the *C. leonhardii* species group is presented as Table 1.

These small to moderately large *Ctenotus* are distinguished from the other species groups by a predominance of reddish rather than olive pigmentation and the replacement of black by dark brown. The pattern is complex and includes longitudinal rows of spots as well as stripes. The dark vertebral and white midlateral stripes may be either distinct, weakly developed or absent. The dark upper lateral zone encloses 1-3 series of pale dots rather than larger spots. In terms of scalation and morphology, the second supraocular scale is not much wider than the first; the lamellae under the toes have an obtuse keel, or narrow to moderately wide callus, and the toes are compressed (from Storr *et al.* 1981).

This paper describes a sixteenth species from the *C. leonhardii* species group which was recently found in the arid southern sector of the Northern Territory. In addition, a key is provided to distinguish the members of the *C. leonhardii* species group.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A total of 12 specimens of a previously undescribed species of *Ctenotus* were examined and compared to specimens of the *C. leonhardii* species group. The specimens