

Reptilia, Serpentes, Colubridae, Tachymenis Wiegmann, 1836: Latitudinal and altitudinal distribution extension in Chile

Gustavo Valenzuela-Dellarossa 1*, Herman Núñez 2, Christoph Heibl 3 and Juan Carlos Ortiz 1

- 1 Universidad de Concepción, Facultad de Ciencias Naturales y Oceanográficas, Departamento de Zoología. Casilla Postal 160-C. Concepción, Chile.
- 2 Museo Nacional de Historia Natural de Santiago. Casilla Postal 787. Quinta Normal, Santiago, Chile.
- 3 Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Systematische Botanik und Mykologie. Menzinger Street 67 80638. München, Germany.
- * Corresponding author. E-mail: guvalenz@udec.cl

ABSTRACT: Observations and pictures of two snakes, Tachymenis peruviana Wiegmann, 1836, and Tachymenis chilensis (Schlegel, 1837), were taken in the Atacama coastal desert, province of Antofagasta, Chile. Furthermore, in the collection of the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural de Santiago, we found two individuals of T. c. chilensis from Cachapoal and Talca provinces. These records represent a northward extension of the known range of T. c. chilensis along the Andean foothills of more than 180 km.

The snake genus Tachymenis Wiegmann, 1836, contains about seven species of slender, small to moderatesized snakes (Uetz and Etzold 1996). In Chile, the genus is represented by two allopatric species: Tachymenis peruviana Wiegmann, 1836, and Tachymenis chilensis (Schlegel 1837). The species T. peruviana, locally known as 'culebra peruana', inhabits altitudes between 1,800 and 4,000 m in the Andes from central Peru and southern Bolivia to northern Chile (Ortiz 1973), while T. chilensis, 'culebra de cola corta', is a lowland species (0-2,000 m) widely distributed in Chile, ranging from the southern part of the Atacama Desert south to Chiloé Island; in the southern part of its range this species is also found east of the Andes in Neuquén, Argentina (Donoso-Barros 1966, Ortiz et al. 1994).

Ortiz (1973) recognized two subspecies of T. chilensis: the northern T. c. coronellina (Werner, 1898) and the southern T. c. chilensis (Schlegel, 1837). While T. c. coronellina was known to occur as far south as San

FIGURE 1. Tachymenis peruviana at Ouebrada de la Plata. Región de Antofagasta, Chile. Photo by C. Heibl, taken on 28 October 2007.

Fernando (34°35' S, 71°00' W), the northern distribution limit of T. c. chilensis reached north to Chillán in the Andean Precordillera (36°36' S, 72°07' W) and Reserva Nacional Los Queules in the Cordillera de la Costa (35°59' S, 72°41' W) (Ortiz 1973, Simonetti 2001), leaving a gap of roughly 1.5° (~ 200 km) separating the subspecies.

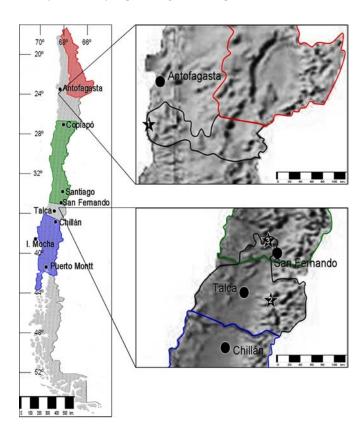


FIGURE 2. Map of Chile showing the known ranges of Tachymenis peruviana, (solid red) Tachymenis chilensis coronellina (solid green) and Tachymenis chilensis chilensis (solid blue), and their modification due to the data presented here (black line, in detail): T. peruviana at Quebrada de la Plata, II Región, Chile (1 star enclosed), T. ch. chilensis from Vilches Alto, VII Región, Chile (2 star enclosed), and T. ch. chilensis from Cachapoal, VI Región, Chile (3 star enclosed).

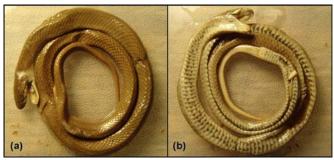


FIGURE 3. Tachymenis chilensis chilensis from Vilches Alto, Chile (MNHN 0982); (a) dorsal and (b) ventral view.

Here we present two recent observations that suggest extensions of the known distribution of both *Tachymenis* peruviana and T. chilensis.

During a botanical fieldwork in the Atacama coastal desert, one of us (CH) have found a Tachymenis specimen at Quebrada de la Plata, II Región, province of Antofagasta (24°42' S, 70°32' W), a Pacific-facing canyon in the rocky coast between Paposo and Antofagasta. The locality lies near the upper limit of vegetation at about 900 m above sea level and is characterized by rocky substrate and a sparse vegetation of shrubs and cacti. The photos taken on the occasion (Figure 1) made possible to identify that specimen as *T. peruviana* based on the species diagnosis given by Ortiz (1973). This situation suggests that highland species is able to occur at lower altitudes, moving across gulches that spread throughout Cordillera de la Costa on post-rain periods (Figure 2).

While working on the *Tachymenis* species collection of the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural de Santiago (MNHN), we have found two individuals of T. c. chilensis from localities where the species had not been sampled before. One specimen was collected from Vilches Alto, VII Región, province of Talca (35°36' S, 71°05' W) (MNHN 0982; Figure 3) and other was found between Monte Lorenzo and Toquihua, VI Región, province of Cachapoal (34°22' S, 71°08' W) (MNHN 4080, Figure 4). These records represent a northward extension of the known range of T. c. chilensis along the Andean foothills of more than 180 km (Figure 2), now slightly overlapping the known range of T. c. coronellina (~ 30 km), and calls for a critical reevaluation of both subspecies (Valenzuela-Dellarossa, ongoing work).



FIGURE 4. Tachymenis chilensis chilensis from Cachapoal, Chile (MNHN 4080); (a) dorsal and (b) ventral view.

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