

Macrocalamus tweediei, a new species of Reed Snake from Malaya

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INTRODUCTION

THE GENUS *Macrocalamus* has been previously represented by the single species *Macrocalamus lateralis* Gunther, the Malayan Mountain Reed Snake. The type locality was not recorded but Gunther's specimen was almost certainly Malayan in origin. A new species has now been found at Gunong Brinchang, Cameron Highlands, Pahang, and although it is known from only two specimens, there are several clear differences which separate it from *M. lateralis*, particular in the scale counts and in the colouration. In order to facilitate comparison between the two species, I am taking this opportunity to add to Gunther's original description.

Genus *MACROCALAMUS* Gunther, 1864

Macrocalamus Gunther, 1864, p. 198 (type species: *Macrocalamus lateralis* Gunther, 1864, by monotypy).

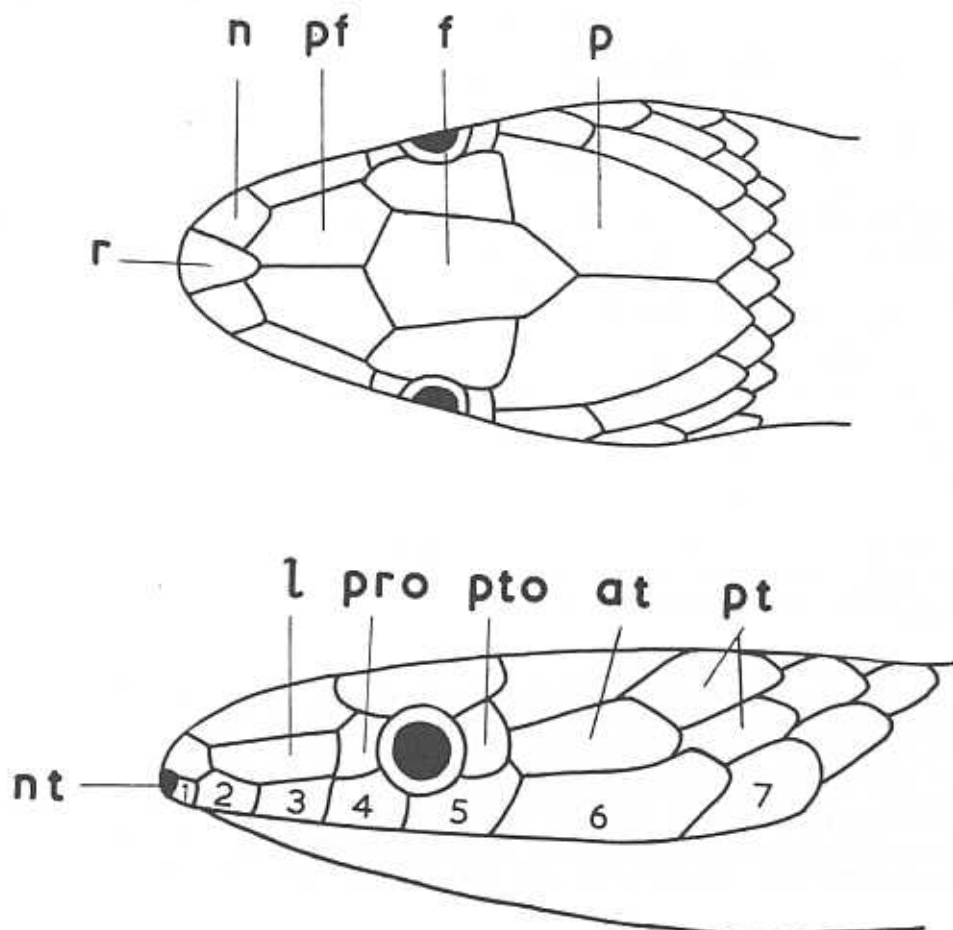


Figure 1. *Macrocalamus tweediei* Lim, (above) dorsal and (below) lateral view of head. (at = anterior temporal, f = frontal, l = loreal, n = nasal, nt = nostril, p = parietal, pf = prefrontal, pro = preocular, pt = posterior temporal, pto = post-ocular, r = rostral).

The rostral scale is longer than broad, extending to the surface of the head, separating the nasals, and meeting the prefrontals. The nostril lies between a nasal scale and the first upper labial. A loreal scale is present but there is no internasal. One preocular and one post-ocular. Subcaudals in two rows.

Macrocalamus tweediei sp. nov.

Text-fig. 1; Plate 2.

Scales.—Rostral scale longer than broad, separating the nasals and coming in contact with the prefrontals. The frontal is slightly longer than broad, and shorter than the parietals. One preocular and one post-ocular. A loreal present, twice as long as broad, touching the 2nd and 3rd upper labials. One anterior and two posterior temporals, but no internasal. Ventrals and subcaudals of the male specimen (holotype) are 134 and 32; the ventrals of the female specimen (paratype) are 147, but with the tail damaged and the subcaudals incomplete. Anal scale entire; mid-body scales in 15 rows; 7 upper labials, the 4th and 5th touching the eye. The holotype measures 17 inches (500 mm.), and the paratype, in which part of the tail is missing, measures only 14 inches (348 mm.).

Colouration.—Uniformly black above, with black and yellow checkered pattern below. The tail of specimen R54,070 (paratype) has a median subcaudal black line, whereas in specimen R57,656 (holotype) the median subcaudal line is obscured. Head with lateral yellow markings just visible dorsally, extending ventrally but not meeting on the underside. Upper and lower labials yellow.

Distribution and behaviour.—The species is herein recorded from only Gunong Brinchang, Cameron Highlands, Pahang at an elevation of 5,000–6,000 ft. The holotype was found by turning over a log beside a stream at 6,000 ft., and the paratype was found lying dead on a path at 5,000 ft. About three feet from where the holotype was caught, one *M. lateralis* was found the next day under a piece of log. This snake is very sluggish, apparently living under dead logs in a fairly damp environment. It is harmless and can easily be handled. In captivity the holotype fed on young house-geckos and preferred to coil itself around a soaked pad in a tin.

Specimens examined.—*Holotype* R57,656, registered by the Institute for Medical Research, Kuala Lumpur, Malaya from Gunong Brinchang, Cameron Highlands, Pahang at an elevation of 6,000 ft., 2.X.1959, collected by Lim Boo Liat and H. E. McClure. The specimen is deposited in the Singapore National Museum. *Paratype* R54,070, from the same locality, elevation 5,000 ft., 10.IX.1958, collected by Phang Ong Wah and M. Nadchatram, is deposited in the Chicago Natural History Museum.

Comments.—The species is named after Mr. M. W. F. Tweedie, former Director of the Singapore National Museum, to whom I am grateful for advice and constant help during the time he was in Malaya.

Macrocalamus lateralis Gunther.

Macrocalamus lateralis Gunther, 1864, p. 199, pl. 18, fig. D (original description; no type locality; type in British Museum); Boulenger, 1894, p. 327 (description of type; type locality: Malay Peninsula ?); Flower, 1899, p. 673 (description; synonymy); Boulenger, 1912, p. 153, fig. 47 (description; synonymy; illustrations); Smith, 1922, p. 266 (description; colouration); Smith, 1930, p. 57 (re-description of Smith, 1922); Tweedie, 1957, p. 55 (description).

Scales.—Ventral scales 109–136; thirty-one unsexed specimens consisting of 13 adults and 18 young from the Singapore National Museum were examined; the thirteen adults had 121, 122, 122, 122, 124, 125, 126, 129, 132, 133, 134, 135 and 136 ventral

scales, and eighteen young had 109, 110, 111, 112, 112, 113, 113, 115, 116, 117, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 129 and 130 ventral scales. Subcaudals 18-30. In addition, 12 adult specimens of the Institute collection, consisting of 6 males and 6 females, were examined. Ventrals and subcaudals of 6 males specimens are 115-128 and 24-29, and those of the 6 females are 129-136 and 21-24 respectively. Anal scale entire; scales in mid-body, 15 rows; 8 upper labials, 4th and 5th touching the eye; a loreal scale present. Head small and wedge-shaped, tail tapering and pointed. Grows to about 15 inches (450 mm.) long.

Colouration.—Adult reddish-brown above, with or without V-shaped markings on the head, neck, and the nape, frequently without such markings. Yellow or orange underneath. The ends of the ventrals are bordered with dark-brown. Tail with or without a median subcaudal line.

Young specimens are more lightly coloured than adults and are orange-brown above with two rows of yellow spots on the back running from the nape towards the end of the tail. The head and neck are patterned with two or more V-shaped markings. The lowest row of the dorsal scales paler, forming pale-yellow longitudinal lines immediately above the dark-brown edges of the ventrals. Orange or pinkish underneath. The labials of both ages are yellow.

Distribution and behaviour.—This snake is common in the Malayan mountains, and most of the specimens have come from the Cameron Highlands and Fraser's Hill, Pahang, or Maxwell's Hill, Perak. The species is also reported from the Larut Hills, Perak, at an elevation of 4,400 ft. by Flower (1899, p. 673), and from Gunung Tahan, Pahang, at 5,400-5,700 ft. by Smith (1922, p. 266). It is reported to feed on worms and slugs (Tweedie, 1957, p. 55).

Since the species was first described, all subsequent records have been from various localities in Malaya. I hereby restrict the type locality to Cameron Highlands, Pahang, Malaya.

Specimens examined.—Forty-three specimens consisting of twenty-five adults and eighteen young were examined. All were collected at various time from the Cameron Highlands and Fraser's Hill, Pahang, and Maxwell's Hill, Perak.

KEY TO THE SPECIES OF *MACROCALAMUS*

- 8 upper labials, body reddish-brown above, yellow or orange below, with or without a pair of pale longitudinal bands towards the underside of the body
 *Macrocalamus lateralis* Gunther
 7 upper labials, body uniformly black above, black and yellow checkered pattern below
 *Macrocalamus tweediei* Lim

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXPLANATION OF PLATE 2

Ventral aspect, of (above) *Macrocalamus tweediei* Lim and (below) *M. lateralis* Gunther.