

A NEW ELAPINE SNAKE FROM WESTERN AUSTRALIA

By ERIC WORRELL, Australian Reptile Park, Gosford, N.S.W.

This tiny burrowing snake was forwarded to me for identification by Mr. Melbourne Ward, of Medlow Bath, N.S.W. The specimen has been in his collection since 1945.

Melwardia gen. nov.

Depressed head not distinct from neck, no canthus rostralis; pupil round; body short, stout, depressed; belly rounded; tail somewhat compressed.

Maxillary about as far forward as palatine with a pair of large venom fangs followed by a single smaller tooth on the end of the bone which terminates posterior to palato-ptyergoidal suture; maxillary arch much larger than its distance to end of the bone; combined frontal bones about as long as broad; the small postfrontal is postorbital, and not in contact with frontal or prefrontal which is sutured to lateral margin of frontal almost precluding it from orbital periphery. No process on ectopterygoid. Nostril in an undivided nasal scale which contacts preocular; loreal absent. Body scales smooth, in 15 rows at midbody; anal scale divided; subcaudals mostly divided.

Melwardia differs from *Rhynchoelaps* in which there are outer processes in the ectopterygoid, from *Rhinelaps* in which the preocular does not contact the nasal, and from *Vermicella* in which the postfrontal bone is more developed and more anterior in position.

Type species, *Melwardia minima* sp. nov.

Melwardia minima sp. nov.

Type: An adult taken at Broome in Western Australia. It has been lodged in the Australian Museum, Sydney, by Mr. Ward.

Diagnosis: There are no close affinities. Characterized by 15 midbody scale rows; 124 ventrals; paired anal; 18 subcaudals of which the first three are single and the balance paired. Pale brown above, black patch on head and another on the neck, ventrals creamish.

Description: Head depressed, not distinct from neck, body short, depressed. Rostral broader than deep extending one-fourth its distance from tip of snout to frontal; internasals a little shorter than



Fig. 1.—*Melwardia minima* sp. nov., photograph of type.

prefrontals; large single nasal contacting large preocular; large frontal, acute posteriorly, one and a half times length and over twice width of supraoculars; large parietals; two postoculars, superior larger; temporals 1 + 2, the posterior temporals being marginal; 6 supralabials, third and fourth subocular, fifth dilated and well in contact with parietal; 6 infralabials; chinshields subequal, third infralabial in contact with both anteriors and posteriors. Total length 175 mm. or 7 in., tail 16 mm. Body width 7 mm.

Colour: Pale brown dorsally, creamish snout with black across frontal to posterior of parietals; fifth infralabial black; a black collar four scales long dorsally and diminishing to a single scale laterally; creamish ventrally.

Affinities: While there are no close affinities, *Melwardia minima* bears a number of superficial points of similarity to several other snakes. In coloration it could be confused with *Rhinelaps warro* (De Vis) and *Vermicella calonota* (Dumeril & Bibron), the latter of which we propose to now include in the newly-created genus *Melwardia*.

In *Rhinelaps warro* the maxillary carries four smaller teeth following the fangs. Other important osteological conditions are present. In *warro* the preocular does not contact the nasal and the ventral and subcaudal scale counts are substantially higher.

Melwardia minima displays a number of specific differences to *calonota*. The arrangement of the temporal scalation is completely

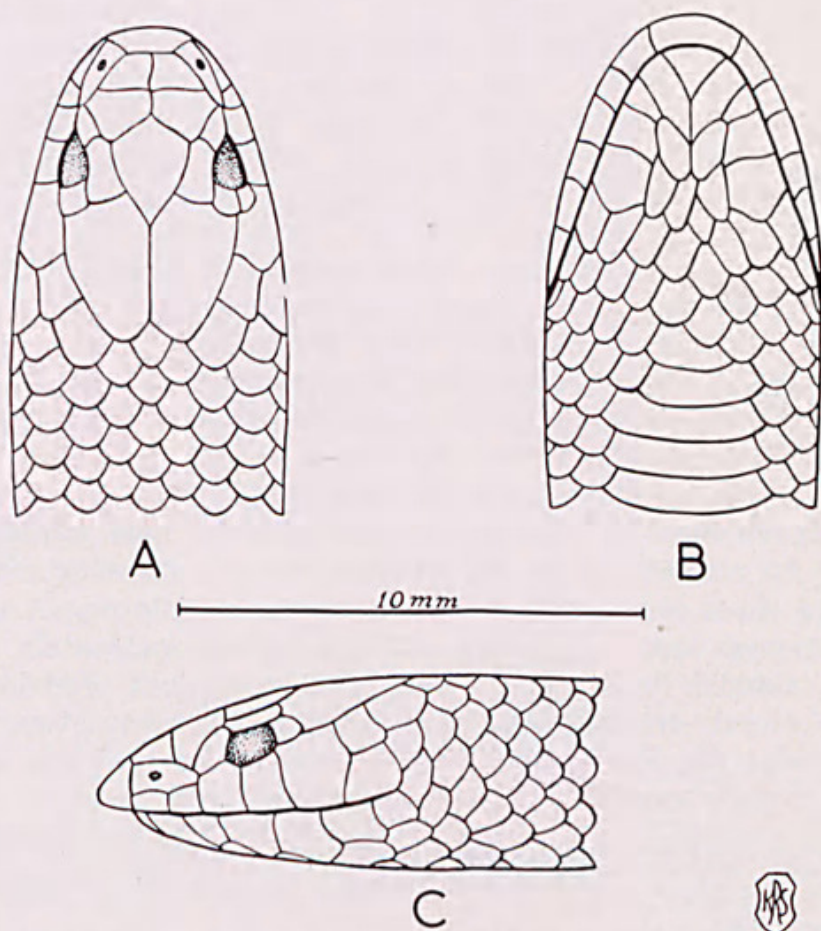


Fig. 2.—*Melwardia minima* sp. nov. A, dorsal aspect. B, ventral aspect. C, lateral aspect.

different. In *minima* the subcaudal count is appreciably lower and there is no vertebral stripe. The maxillary bones of both species are differently shaped. The only other small Australian Elapine snake which approaches the low combined subcaudal and ventral scale counts of *Melwardia minima* is *Rhynchoelaps bertholdi* (Jan.). However, *M. minima* is an unbanded snake and there are no outer processes on the ectopterygoid which are prominent features in *Rhynchoelaps*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The figures were competently drawn by Mr. K. Slater, animal ecologist at the Australian Reptile Park, Gosford, N.S.W.

A NEW SPECIES OF WEED-FISH OF THE GENUS PETRAITES FROM WESTERN AUSTRALIA

By NORMAN E. MILWARD, Department of Zoology, University of Western Australia, Nedlands.*

FAMILY CLINIDAE

Petraites equiradiatus sp. nov.

D.iii,xxviii.3; A.ii,20; P.12; V.(i),3; C.11.

Body fairly elongate, the greatest height contained 4.6 times in the standard length (5.4 in the total length including caudal). Snout rounded; head 4.1 times in standard length (4.9 in total length). Minute cycloid scales. Nasal cirrus well developed, multifid with 8 or 9 filaments. Supra-orbital tentacle with a long, tapering outer filament and two short inner ones, all broadly joined at base. First three dorsal spines about equal in length, very slightly longer than those following from which they are separated by a gap approximately equal to third spine when depressed; first spine situated just before vertical from margin of pre-operculum and the third joined by membrane to basal portion of fourth, which is placed over hind border of operculum. Anal fin commences beneath twelfth dorsal spine. First anal spine about two-thirds length of second; rays subequal, the posterior ones, with exception of last, being a fraction longer than the anterior. Last dorsal ray wholly connected to caudal peduncle by membrane; last anal ray only joined basally. Pectoral fin rounded, thick simple rays. Ventral fin with a concealed spine and three similar finger-like rays; the middle ray is only very slightly longer than other two and reaches approximately half-way to vent. Caudal fin truncate. Lateral line distinct anteriorly as a series of closely-set tubed-scales extending over about two-thirds of the pectoral fin, the series then descending to mid-line and continuing to tail, becoming very widely spaced and obscure.

Colour in formalin:—Fairly uniform yellow, except for paler abdomen. Faintest suggestion of about seven darker yellow bands on upper sides.

*Present address: State Fisheries Department, G.P.O. Box 30, Sydney, N.S.W.



Worrell, Eric. 1960. "A New Elapine Snake from Western Australia." *The Western Australian Naturalist* 7(5), 132–134.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/274794>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/311729>

Holding Institution

Western Australian Naturalists' Club (Inc.)

Sponsored by

Atlas of Living Australia

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the rights holder.

Rights Holder: Western Australian Naturalists' Club (Inc.)

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Rights: <http://biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.