

Case 3043***Varanus teriae* Sprackland, 1991 (Reptilia, Squamata): proposed conservation of the specific name**

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Abstract. The purpose of this application is to conserve the specific name of *Varanus teriae* Sprackland, 1991 for a tree monitor from northeastern Australia. The name is threatened by the earlier but obscurely published and rarely used name *Odatria keithhornei* Wells & Wellington, 1985 which was based on the same type specimen. It is proposed that the latter name be suppressed.

Keywords. Nomenclature; taxonomy; Reptilia; Squamata; VARANIDAE; lizards; tree monitors; *Varanus teriae*; Australia.

1. In 1980 (pp. 103–109, pl. 1) Gregory Czechura reported on specimens of tree monitors from the rain forest of central coastal Cape York Peninsula, northeastern Australia, in the collections of the Queensland Museum, Brisbane, which he identified as melanistic examples of *Varanus prasinus* (Schlegel, [1839]) (p. 78, pl. 22, fig. 5), the emerald or green tree monitor, previously known only from New Guinea and adjacent islands. Hitherto the species had been occasionally listed as being represented in the continental Australian herpetofauna but there were no preserved specimens to substantiate the claim. Czechura (1980) used available identification keys to differentiate his specimens from three nominal subspecies of *V. prasinus* and, although noting the very different coloration and more prominent body keels, tentatively identified them as the first records of the nominate *V. prasinus prasinus* for mainland Australia.

2. In 1982 one of us (R.G.S.) undertook a taxonomic revision of the *Varanus prasinus* species group. Sprackland read Czechura's (1980) paper, borrowed the Queensland Museum material and noted sufficient diagnostic differences to place (Sprackland, 1991a, p. 570, figs. 6, 7, tables 1, 2) the mainland lizards in a new species, *Varanus teriae*. The taxon was described as 'a predominantly melanistic lizard, with light bluish-green snout tip, yellow dorsal spots forming thin, paired chevrons and caudal rings, a pronounced temporal streak, and a pale yellowish ventor, readily distinguished by colour and pattern from all other tree monitors. It is further distinguished by the conical, not flat, gular scales, a more anterior nostril, and

by a more robust appearance, especially the postocular region'. The holotype (catalogue no. J31566 in the Queensland Museum) was from Buthen Buthen, Nesbit River, Cape York Peninsula, collected by Czechura in August 1978.

3. Since its publication, the specific name of *Varanus teriae* has been used in various works, most of which have been cited in *Zoological Record*. These include Covacevich & Couper (1991), Sprackland (1991b, 1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1995), Cogger (1992), Cogger, Cameron, Sadler & Egger (1993), Covacevich & McDonald (1993), Whittier & Moeller (1993), Bennett (1995), Card & Kluge (1995), Frank & Ramus (1995), van Kalken (1995), De Lisle (1996), Steel (1966) and Welsch (in press). To our knowledge the name has been used by at least 19 authors in 18 publications. The lizard features in documentation relating to conservation of protected species, some of which is cited above, and is listed under the name *Varanus teriae* in the *World checklist of threatened amphibians and reptiles* (1993, p. 50) and in the most recent publication (1996) issued by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

4. During the period 1982–1991 extensive literature review by Sprackland and consultation with several colleagues also working on varanids failed to find a valid name already in existence for *Varanus teriae*. In March 1995 Sprackland became aware of the possibility that, in addition to the (1984) serial publication by Wells & Wellington, new varanid names might exist in a second privately published revision of Australian herpetofauna (Wells & Wellington, 1985a). Despite searches in major libraries in the U.K., Europe and the U.S.A. it was not possible to obtain a copy of the latter and Sprackland located it only at the office of the Commission Secretariat in London. Requests for a copy from the original authors went unanswered (although a cheque for payment was cashed by the 'Australian Herpetologists' League'). In the 1985a publication by Wells & Wellington, Czechura's lizards from mainland Australia were given (p. 21) the name *Odatia keithhornei*. The authors noted that the species was 'a member of the *Odatia prasinus* complex, believed confined to Cape York Peninsula, Queensland and readily identified by referring to the excellent diagnostic and descriptive data in Czechura (1980)', and the name *keithhornei* was made available under Article 13a(ii) of the Code. The holotype was specimen no. J31566 in the Queensland Museum and *keithhornei* is thus a senior objective synonym of *teriae*. *Odatia*, a genus proposed by Gray (1838, p. 394) and relegated to a subgenus by Mertens (1942) and subsequent authors, is a valid taxon within *Varanus* Merrem, 1820. However, work by Böhme (1988) and by Sprackland (1991b) has demonstrated that the *V. prasinus* group does not belong to *Odatia* but instead to the New Guinean subgenus *Euprepiosaurus* Fitzinger, 1843.

5. In 1985 King & Miller (pp. 4–5) published a review of Wells & Wellington's first (1984) paper. They considered that the publication had been inadequately researched and that the wholesale alterations to existing classification and nomenclature were likely to cause destabilisation and confusion. They noted that the Australian Society of Herpetologists had unanimously adopted a resolution to request the Commission to suppress the work. The instability which would result from acceptance of this work and two further herpetological publications by Wells & Wellington (1985a, 1985b) generated a number of comments (see, for example, Heatwole, 1985, p. 6; Gans, 1985, pp. 6–7; Tyler, 1985, p. 69; Grigg & Shine, 1985, pp. 96–97; Thulborn, 1986, pp. 13–14; and Heatwole & Taylor, 1987, p. 262). An application by the President of

the Australian Society of Herpetologists was published in June 1987 (BZN 44: 116–121) seeking the suppression for nomenclatural purposes of the three works by Wells & Wellington (1984, 1985a and 1985b). Publication of the application was followed by many comments, some of which were published in BZN 44: 257–261; 45: 52–54, 145–153, 216; and 47: 139–140. The Commission considered the case at its meeting in Amsterdam in September 1991 and decided (see the report in BZN 48: 337–338; December 1991) that suppression of the three publications would be ineffective in eliminating confusion but that it would deal with individual nomenclatural problems generated by the works as and when a need arose.

6. In the years since its publication the specific name of *Varanus teriae* Sprackland, 1991 has consistently been used for the mainland species of tree monitor, and the species appears under this name in legal documentation relating to its conservation and management. Recognition of the entirely rarely used *keithhornei* as valid for the taxon, and substitution of this name for *teriae*, would cause considerable confusion. We therefore propose that the specific name of *Odatia keithhornei* Wells & Wellington, 1985 be suppressed.

7. The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature is accordingly asked:

- (1) to use its plenary powers to suppress the specific name *keithhornei* Wells & Wellington, 1985, as published in the binomen *Odatia keithhornei*, for the purposes of the Principle of Priority but not for those of the Principle of Homonymy;
- (2) to place on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology the name *teriae* Sprackland, 1991, as published in the binomen *Varanus teriae*;
- (3) to place on the Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Specific Names in Zoology the name *keithhornei* Wells & Wellington, 1985, as published in the binomen *Odatia keithhornei* and as suppressed in (1) above.

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