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A POPULATION OF *TYPHLOPS BRAMINUS* (DAUDIN) ON THE CAPE PENINSULA (REPTILIA; TYPHLOPIDAE)

G R McLACHLAN

Department of Herpetology, South African Museum

Accepted: March 1978

Typhlops braminus (Daudin, 1803)

Eryx braminus Daudin, 1803: 279.

Type locality: Vizagapatam.

Andrew Smith (1846: pl. 51, fig. 3; pl. 56, figs. 9-16) described a new species of *Typhlops* from South Africa under the name *Onycocephalus capensis* and stated "Inhabits the Interior of Southern Africa, and is found, like other members of the genus, either in the ground or under stones &c." FitzSimons (1937) examined the specimens in the British Museum and under the heading *Typhlops braminus* made the following comment. "There are four specimens of Smith's *O. capensis* in the British Museum regarded as typical. These were described by Smith as from the Interior of Southern Africa and here again a confusion of localities has taken place as the species in question occurs only in Southern Asia and the islands of the Indian Ocean." Roux-Estève (1974) lists Smith's *O. capensis* as a

synonym of *T. braminus* and remarks that the type can no longer be found.

Rendahl (1918) described another two *Typhlops* species based on specimens allegedly collected at the Cape in 1906. He named them *Typhlops capensis* and *T. albanalis*, but Roux-Estève considers them to be examples of *T. comorensis* Boulenger and *T. ocellaris* Parker respectively.

While working through the South African Museum collection, the writer found six specimens of *Typhlops braminus* from the Cape Peninsula, two more have been brought in recently, and Dr D G Broadley has kindly drawn attention to one in the Transvaal Museum collected by J D Visser. Yet another was found in the Museum grounds by G Avery but, being damaged, was not retained.

Details of the specimens are given in Table 1.

It is clear from the above specimens that there is a thriving colony of *Typhlops braminus* established on the Cape Peninsula and that the species has spread as far as Plumstead which is some 10 km south of Cape Town. It is obvious that Smith did indeed collect his specimens of *Onycocephalus capensis* in the Cape probably from the Company's garden, but being notoriously casual about precise type-localities, described them as coming from the "Interior" as he did in the case of so many other species. It may appear strange that Smith collected four specimens while only a few more have come to light in the ensuing 125 years. However, as Wall (1921) has pointed out, this snake is incredibly common in Ceylon and

India, "one subaltern . . . collected about 100 in his house in about a month". It would therefore be quite feasible for several to be found in a potted plant from the East and for these to have been taken to Smith at the newly founded Museum.

In fresh material of *T. braminus*, the glandular markings on the head are very prominent. They are well illustrated in Figure 1, reproduced from M A Smith (1943).

MacDowell (1974) has pointed out that the species appears to consist only of females which are capable of parthenogenetic reproduction, which obviously is of great assistance when colonizing new habitats. The same writer has also pointed out that the correct name for this reptile is *Typhlina bramina* (Daudin).

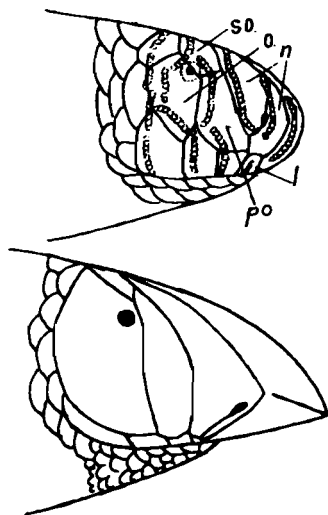


FIGURE 1.

Head of *Typhlops braminus* above ($\times 7$) showing characteristic glands; and head of *Typhlops lalandei* below ($\times 5$). From M A Smith (1943). *l*, labial; *n*, nasal; *o*, ocular; *po*, preocular; *so*, supraocular.

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TABLE 1.

Details of specimens of *Typhlops braminus* collected in the vicinity of Cape Town.

			Length and diameter (mm)	
SAMZR	13647	Municipal Gardens	April 1915	150 \times 4,5
	18905	University of Cape Town, Rondebosch	September 1937	93 \times 2,0
	43242	Devil's Peak, Table Mountain	19 December 1959	155 \times 3,5
	43240	South African Museum grounds	16 February 1960	133 \times 2,5
	43579	Tamboerskloof, Cape Town	11 April 1973	135 \times 2,5
	43578	Devil's Peak, Table Mountain	13 April 1976	96 \times 2,0
	43861	Plumstead, Cape Town	23 March 1976	68 \times 1,5
	43862	Mowbray, Cape Town	31 March 1976	62 \times 1,0
TM	32625	Sea Point, Cape Town	August 1966	—