

# New distribution records for the southern semiornate snake, *Meizodon s. semiornatus* (Peters, 1854), with a first record from the Kruger National Park and Transvaal

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The southern semiornate snake, *Meizodon s. semiornatus*, has a fairly wide distribution in south-east Africa, but due to its secretive habits, it is seldom seen or collected. In South Africa, this species was previously known from only one specimen collected in Zululand during 1965. A second specimen was collected near Crocodile Bridge in the Kruger National Park on 8 November 1987 and constitutes the first record of the species in the Transvaal. Other distribution records for the species were obtained from museums and an updated distribution map was compiled.

Key words: Kruger National Park, Colubridae, distribution, *Meizodon semiornatus*, Transvaal.

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## Introduction

The southern semiornate snake, *Meizodon s. semiornatus* (Peters, 1854) is a small shy diurnal species extending from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda southwards through Mozambique to Zululand and eastern Swaziland and westwards through Zimbabwe to northeastern Botswana (Broadley 1983). Due to its small size, secretive habits and fairly inhospitable habitat of well-wooded areas, it is not often seen and its distribution and general biology are virtually unknown.

The genus *Meizodon* is confined to tropical Africa where it is represented by five species—*Meizodon coronatus* (Schlegel, 1837) which occurs in West Africa (Welch 1982); *M. plumbiceps* (Boettger, 1893) which occurs in north-east Africa (Schatti 1985); *M. regularis* Fischer, 1856 which occurs from Central to north East Africa (Schatti 1985) as well as *M. krameri* (Schatti, 1985) which occurs in Kenya. Hoervers & Johnson (1982) has shown that *M. plumbiceps* is a full species,

rather than a sub-species of *semiornatus*, while Schatti (1985) has shown that the species *semiornatus* can be divided into two races: *M. s. semiornatus* (Peters, 1854) which occurs from Kenya southwards to Zululand (Broadley 1983) and *M. s. tchadensis* (Chabanaud, 1917) which occurs in Sudan in northern Africa (Schatti 1985).

The first *Meizodon s. semiornatus* specimen recorded for South Africa was collected at Mhlosinga in Zululand (2732 Cc) during 1965 (Broadley 1983). On 8 November 1987, an adult male specimen was collected dead on the road by Mr J. van Rhyn in the Kruger National Park near the Crocodile Bridge gate (2531 Bd). It was preserved and deposited in the herpetological collection of the Transvaal Museum (TM66986).

## Distribution

The distribution of *Meizodon s. semiornatus* in southern Africa was illustrated by Broadley (1983). The updated localities as plotted in

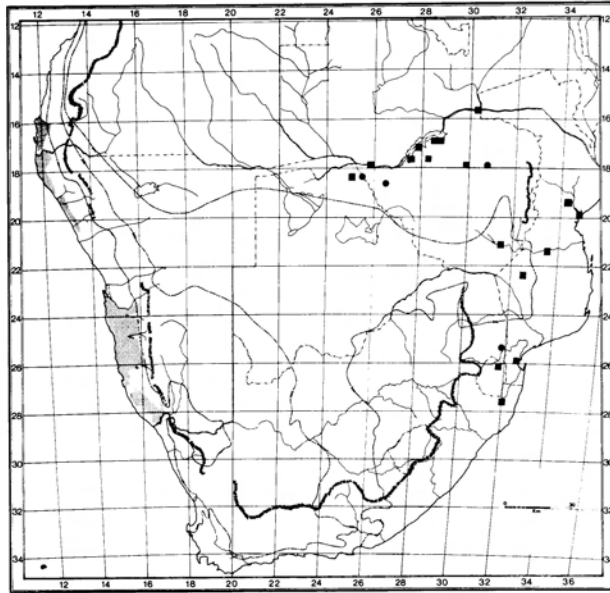


Fig 1. Updated distribution of the semiornate snake, *Meizodon s. semiornatus* in southern Africa as compiled from museum specimens.

Figure 1 do not significantly extend the range as defined by Broadley (1983). The occurrence of this species in the Kruger National Park, as suspected by Jacobsen & Haacke (1980) and Pienaar, Haacke & Jacobsen (1983), is of importance in that Branch (1988b) lists the species as peripheral in the Red Data Book for Reptiles and Amphibians. Localities for the distribution of this species in southern Africa were obtained from the records of the Transvaal Musum (TM) and the Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe (NMZB) and are listed in Appendix 1.

### Habitat

The semiornate snake occurs primarily in well-wooded areas along river courses in arid and mesic savannah (Branch 1988a, 1988b; Broadley 1988; Broadley & Cock 1986) and apparently in association with decomposing vegetation (Broadley 1983; Auerbach 1987).

Broadley (1971) reported specimens from Zambia in flood plains and rivers, dry savannah (Pitman 1974) to higher elevations, reaching 2 500 m in Kenya (Spawls 1978).

### Conclusion

Herpetological research in the Kruger National Park has revealed the presence of 114 reptilian species of which 52 are snakes. The importance of even casual collecting such as road kills can not be overstressed such as in this instance. Further research on reptiles is needed to provide a better indication on the ecology, distribution and role of the reptiles within the Kruger National Park.

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## Appendix A

Updated list of localities where *Meizodon s. semiornatus* has been collected.

### South Africa

Natal. Mhlosinga, Zululand - TM 32021.  
Transvaal. Crocodile Bridge, Eastern Transvaal - TM 66986.

### Zimbabwe

Sebungwe - NMZB 870; Lake Kariba - NMZB 3591, NMZB-UM 18523; Kwekwe - NMZB 3924, 3933; Kariba - NMZB-QVM 173, NMZB-UM 5163, 5303, 23836, 28669; Kanyemba - NMZB-UM 9244; Zambesi National Park, Chamabonda - NMZB-UM 31936; Chizarira National Park - NMZB-UM 31913; Hwange - NMZB 7737.

### Swaziland

Tshaneni - TM 52452, 51007, 54029, 54741, NMZB-UB 32731, NMZB 5884.

### Botswana

Chuma pan - NMZB-UM 13339; Kazuma Depression (Broadley 1988).

### Mozambique

Mud-Lamego - NMZB-UM 7226, 7227, 7228; Beira - TM 25200; Maputo (Broadley 1983).