

**KAESTLEA: A NEW GENUS OF SCINCID LIZARDS
(SCINCIDAE: LYGOSOMINAE) FROM THE WESTERN
GHATS, SOUTH-WESTERN INDIA**

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(with four text-figures)

ABSTRACT.— A lineage of lygosomines, allocated in the past variously to *Scincella*, *Lygosoma*, *Leiolopisma* and *Asymblepharus*, comprising five nominal species endemic to the Western Ghats of south-western India, is allocated to a new genus, *Kaestlea*. The genus includes the following species: *Mocoo bilineata* Gray, 1846; *Mocoo travancorica* Beddome, 1870; *Lygosoma beddomii* Boulenger, 1887; *Lygosoma laterimaculatum* Boulenger, 1887 and *Lygosoma (Leiolopisma) travancoricum* var. *palnica* Boettger, 1892. Lectotypes of all recognised species are designated. The relationships of these species with others lygosomine skinks of Asia and America (including the genera *Scincella*, *Sphenomorphus* and *Asymblepharus*) are discussed. Diagnoses and a key to the species of *Kaestlea* are provided.

KEY WORDS.— *Kaestlea*, new genus, Scincidae, lectotype designation, systematics, Western Ghats, India.

INTRODUCTION

In the last major work on the lizard fauna of southern Asia, Smith (1935) transferred several species of lygosomine scincids, variously allocated to the genus *Mocoo* (*bilineatum* and *travancorica*), or to *Lygosoma* (*laterimaculatum*, *beddomii*, *travancoricum* var. *palnica*) to the genus *Leiolopisma*. However, several subsequent authors (e.g., Constable, 1949) have retained them in *Lygosoma* (*Leiolopisma*). Subsequently, these nominal species have been included in the genus *Scincella* Mittleman, 1950 (e.g., Mittleman, 1952; Greer, 1974; Ouboter, 1986), and more recently, together with the Himalayan species (*ladacensis*, *himalayanus*, *sikkimensis*, and *capitaneus*), were transferred to *Asymblepharus* Eremchenko and Szczerbak, 1980, subgenus *Himablepharus* Eremchenko, 1987 (type species: *Mocoo sikimmense* Blyth, 1835).

We examined a series of representatives of all five nominal species of the group from the Western Ghats, and report differences from both *Asymblepharus* and *Scincella*, including Group II alpha palate (sensu Greer, 1974: primitive in the *Sphenomorphus*-group, but in respect to *Asymblepharus* and *Scincella*, is an apomorphy) and the presence of rudimentary pterygoid teeth (e.g., *travancorica*: 4-5 [BMNH 82.5.22.114] or 2-3 [BMNH 82.5.22.127-128]; *bilineata*: 1 [BMNH 70.1129.1-2]; absent in *laterimaculata* and *palnica*). These and other characters (including their allopatric distribution), here considered synapomorphies, support the elevation of the lineage to the rank of a genus, which is formally described herein.

ABBREVIATIONS USED

Institutional abbreviations used here are listed below. Abbreviations follow Leviton et al. (1985).