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THE NOMINAL SNAKE GENERA MASTIGODRYAS AMARAL, 1934, AND DRYADOPHIS STUART, 1939

Hobart M. Smith and Kenneth R. Larsen

Abstract.—Some recent workers who have combined the genera Mastigodryas Amaral, 1834, and Dryadophis Stuart, 1939, under the former name, have done so prematurely in view of characters by Amaral that differentiate them. Either the genera should be maintained distinct, or the younger, but widely-known name, Dryadophis, should be retained through exercise of the plenary powers of the ICZN, already requested.

Prompted by Romer’s (1956: 577) indication of the synonymy of Mastigodryas Amaral, 1934, and Dryadophis Stuart, 1939, a proposal was made (Smith, 1963) that Mastigodryas be suppressed under the plenary powers of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature in order to preserve the more familiar Dryadophis. The ICZN never acted upon the proposal, however, because Amaral (1964) pointed out that the monotypic Mastigodryas should not be regarded as a synonym of Dryadophis, since it has no apical scale pits and 70 subcaudals, whereas in Dryadophis the subcaudals number 79 or more, and paired apical scale pits are present in all species.

Nevertheless Peters and Orejas-Miranda (1970:190) lumped the two genera, citing all valid Central and South American species-group taxa of Dryadophis under the generic name Mastigodryas. No mention was made of the comments by Smith and Amaral that appeared in the Bulletin of Zoological Nomenclature; but Romer’s observation was noted and the comment added that Peters had seen the type of M. danieli, that he concluded it is congeneric with Dryadophis, and that priority should be observed.

We have not seen any specimens of M. danieli, but on the basis of Amaral’s (1964) comments maintain that to regard it as congeneric with Dryadophis is premature. Dryadophis merits perpetuation until more conclusive evidence of synonymy with Mastigodryas is available. If such a conclusion is confirmed, reconsideration should be given to suppression of the nominal genus Mastigodryas in order to preserve the widely known name Dryadophis, resubmitting for ICZN action the proposal first presented in 1963.

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