

Comments on the type specimen of *Dracaena guianensis* Daudin, 1801 (Reptilia: Sauria: Teiidae), and rediscovery of the species in French Guiana

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Zool. Med. Leiden 74 (9), 15.ix.2000: 167-180, figs 1-8.— ISSN 0024-0672.

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Key words: *Dracaena*; holotype; rediscovery; type locality; range extension; French Guiana.

A discussion on the whereabouts of the holotype of *Dracaena guianensis* is given, and its rediscovery in the National Museum of Natural History, Leiden, The Netherlands (RMNH) and the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Anatomie Comparée, Paris, France (MNHN-AC) is reported. The RMNH possesses a stuffed specimen, of which the left forelimb has been amputated in life and of which the skull is no longer present in the specimen. The Paris museum possesses a skull that fits the Leiden specimen. Thus, the stuffed specimen and the skull together form the complete holotype, each object can be considered a "schizotype" of the holotype. After one of us observed the species again in French Guiana and documented this with a picture, the correction of the type locality to Amapá is discussed and considered erroneous. Thus Cayenne again is considered the type locality.

Une discussion est menée à propos du holotype de *Dracaena guianensis*, et sa redécouverte au National Museum of Natural History, Leiden, The Netherlands (RMNH), et au Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Anatomie Comparée, Paris, France (MNHN-AC) est indiquée. Le RMNH possède un spécimen empaillé, dépourvu de crâne, dont le membre antérieur gauche fut emputé lorsqu'il était encore vivant. Le Muséum de Paris possède un crâne de cette même espèce. Après étude, il s'avère que le crâne correspond tout à fait au spécimen empaillé ; ces deux pièces forment ensemble l'holotype, et peuvent être considérées chacune comme un "schizotype" de l'holotype. En raison l'observation récente de l'espèce en Guyane française, appuyé par un document photographique, la correction de la localité type à l'Amapá est discutée, et considérée comme éronnée. Cayenne est à nouveau considérée comme la localité type.

Uma discussão sobre o holotipo de *Dracaena guianensis* é apresentada, registrando-se sua redescoberta no Nationaal Natuurhistorisch Museum, Leiden, Países Baixos (RMNH), e no Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Anatomie Comparée, Paris, França (MNHN-AC). O RMNH possui um espécime empalhado, destituído de crânio, no qual o membro anterior esquerdo foi amputado quando o animal ainda vivia. O MNHN-AC possui um crânio dessa mesma espécie. Nossos estudos demonstram que o crânio corresponde ao espécime empalhado, os quais em conjunto formam o holótipo de *Dracaena guianensis*. Crânio e espécime constituem, portanto, cada um, um "schizótipo". Tendo em vista a observação recente da espécie na Guiana Francesa por um de nós, documentada por foto, rejeita-se a correção da localidade-tipo como sendo o Amapá. Cayenne volta a ser a localidade-tipo.

Introduction

Two species are presently recognised in the lizard genus *Dracaena*. The most widespread species, *Dracaena guianensis* Daudin, 1801, occurs throughout Amazonia, essentially following the Amazon river and some of its principal (southern) tributaries (Avila-Pires, 1995: 546). The second species, *Dracaena paraguayensis* Amaral, 1950, is

restricted to Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil and Paraguay (Vanzolini & Valencia, 1965).

D. guianensis is a large and stout teiid lizard reaching a maximum snout-vent length of 360 mm (Avila-Pires, 1995: 541). It lives in swampy areas and spends most of its time on low trees, though feeding only occurs in water (Vanzolini & Valencia, 1965); it feeds mostly on shells which it breaks with its strong molariform posterior teeth. Because of its ecological habits and its skin resembling that of crocodylians (caimans), it is commonly named "caiman-lizard" in English and "lézard-caïman" in French; La Cépède (1788) called it "La dragonne": he was also the first to give a good description and a picture of this species. Unfortunately, he used the name *Lacerta dracaena* [sic], previously used by Linnæus (1758) for a varanid species (see Opinions International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature, 1959). Thus, La Cépède's description was without available name. In fact, Daudin (1801) was the first to give a good description and an acceptable binomen, *Dracaena guianensis*, still used today.

The aim of this note is to update the situation concerning the type specimen and its probable locality in the light of recently acquired data.

Discussion on the type specimen

When describing "La dragonne", La Cépède (1788) gave details for only one specimen. It is clear he only had one specimen and not more from the fact that in the description he always used the singular, and especially the following part of a sentence leaves no doubt about the material he saw (La Cépède, 1788: 245): "...il y a, au Cabinet du Roi, un individu de cette espèce, qui a été envoyé de Cayenne par M. de la Borde, & d'après lequel nous avons fait la description que l'on vient de lire (c);". The footnote (c) refers to a table of measurements of the specimen, which was again repeated by Daudin (1801). Later, Daudin (1801: 425) wrote about *D. guianensis*: "Je regarde donc comme vrai type de dragonne [sic] un saurien qui a été envoyé, il y a quelques années, de Cayenne au museum [sic] d'histoire naturelle de Paris par Delaborde [sic], et que le savant professeur Lacépède [sic] a décrit et figuré dans son ouvrage sur les quadrupèdes ovipares". From this sentence it is clear that the type specimen for the binomen *Dracaena guianensis* Daudin, 1801 is the same specimen as that described by La Cépède in 1788 as "La dragonne". In addition, Daudin (1801: 429) gave a table with exactly the same meristic data as provided by La Cépède (1788: 245). The legend of this table reads as follows: "Dimensions de la dragonne [sic] qui est conservée dans la collection du museum [sic] d'histoire naturelle de Paris, Par Lacépède [sic]". Thus, Daudin clearly indicated that he saw the only specimen of *Dracaena guianensis* available at that time, and which already had been described by La Cépède (1788).

MNHN 8735 has been considered the type specimen of *Dracaena guianensis* (e.g. Hoogmoed & Lescure, 1975: 166; Brygoo, 1989: 19; Avila-Pires, 1995: 540). In fact, this assumption is wrong. The size data given by La Cépède (1788: 245), and repeated by Daudin (1801: 429), do not agree with those of MNHN 8735 (Table 1). For instance, the La Cépède's specimen had a total length of 790 mm¹, against 925 mm for MNHN

¹ All the measurements provided by La Cépède (1788) and Daudin (1801) are in ancient French units as follows: 1 pied = 325 mm, 1 pouce = 27.07 mm, 1 ligne = 2.25 mm. The measures cited in the present paper were all converted to mm.

Table 1.— Table comparing characters given for the specimens of *Dracaena guianensis* studied by La Cepède (1788), Daudin (1801) and Duméril & Bibron (1839), for the stuffed specimen in Leiden (RMNH 28888), for the Paris skull and mandibles (MNHN-AC 2000.242) and for MNHN 8735, erroneously considered as Daudin's holotype for *Dracaena guianensis*. Note that the total length given by Duméril & Bibron (790 mm) for this latter specimen does not correspond to the sum (940 mm) of all other parameters. (Question marks = lacking data; - = measurements could not be taken; * indicates external measurements of the head, not the skull; all measures in mm).

Characters	La Cepède 1788	Daudin 1801	RMNH 28888	Dum & Bibr 1839	MNHN 8735 in 1999	skull MNHN-AC 2000.242
Head length	?	?	see below	90	85	-
Neck length	?	?	44	60	60	-
Trunk length	?	?	195	220	210	-
Tail length, total	447	447	440	570	560	-
Total length	794	794	755	790 (instead of 940)	925	-
Mouth outline	117	117	135	?	175	-
Distance between eyes	27	27	26.8	?	29	-
Maximum body circumference	203	203	220	?	245	-
Tail base circumference	153	153	145	?	160	-
One limb absent	yes	?	yes	?	no	-
Hind limb	148	148	bent	170	165	-
Fore limb	103	103	bent	130	128	-
Skull/head width, widest point at temple	-	-	51.3*	-	75.7*	34
Skull/head width, posterior part skull	-	-	46.4*	-	-	41.4
Skull/head length to posterior edge tympanum	-	-	76*	-	104*	80
Skull/head length to anterior edge tympanum	-	-	69.1*	-	112*	69.2
Snout-vent length	-	-	315	-	365	-
Tail regenerated part	-	-	180	-	-	-
Skull length (greatest length), left	-	-	-	-	-	83
Skull length to end auditory bulb, left	-	-	-	-	-	81.6
Skull/head width below eyes	-	-	38.3*	-	60.3*	37.9
Skull/head width base skull betw auditory bulbs	-	-	47.5*	-	65.2*	41.4
Skull height	-	-	-	-	-	26.2
Interorbital distance	-	-	8.5*	-	56.1*	8.5
Length left mandible	-	-	-	-	-	83.0
Length right mandible	-	-	-	-	-	83.8

8735. Moreover, La Cépède (1788: 19) in a footnote to the general part of the book, in a discussion on regeneration, far removed from the description of “La dragonne”, revealed an additional, notable character: “L’on conserve au Cabinet du Roi, un grand lézard, de l’espèce appelée dragonne, auquel il manque une patte [= one limb is missing]; il paraît qu’il l’avait perdue par quelqu’accident, lorsqu’il était déjà assez gros; car la cicatrice qui s’est formée est considerable. C’est M. de la Borde, Médecin du roi à Cayenne, & correspondant du Cabinet du Roi, qui l’a envoyé”. Unlike the specimen studied by La Cépède and sent by La Borde from Cayenne (French Guiana), MNHN 8735 has four limbs, although some fingers and toes now are missing. We therefore come to the conclusion that MNHN 8735 certainly can not be the specimen described by La Cépède in 1788.

In the dry collections of the Nationaal Natuurhistorisch Museum (formerly Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie) (acronym to be used RMNH) one of us (MSH) had noted in the late nineteesixties a stuffed specimen of *Dracaena guianensis* (RMNH 28888) which was rather peculiar because it lacked the left forelimb, had all the correct label data corresponding with those given by La Cépède (1788), but never was considered the specimen described by La Cépède (1788), because in the description La Cépède never mentioned the very obvious fact that one limb was missing. Now that the senior author of this paper (JCM) discovered the remark in the footnote on p. 19 (La Cépède, 1788), mentioned before, about the specimen missing a leg, things suddenly became clear and we now can safely conclude that the RMNH specimen is the one that was used by La Cépède (1788) for his description and later on also by Daudin (1801). The specimen is a stuffed specimen, mounted on some wooden planks. It is accompanied by the following data:

A label which has been nailed to the side of the main plank, reading in bold lettering: *Crocodylus lacertinus* (which has been striked out and replaced by “*Dracaena guianensis* Daud” in smaller and more delicate letters), Mus. Paris, Cayenne (fig. 1).

There are more data are on the bottom of the planks as follows:

A cardboard label nailed to the central, longitudinal plank, that reads (words written in ink):

Crocodylus dracaena

La dragonne

Mus. Paris Cayenne

The (obviously handmade) label has a red edge, composed of an outer red line, separated by some white from six very closely arranged red lines forming a band, and an inner red line, again separated by some white from the central red band. These red ink lines have been drawn by hand (fig.4).

The text on the label is also written on the white-painted part of the underside of the same central plank in a different handwriting and in pencil (fig. 5).

Partly hidden by the label there was some more text on two areas that were not painted white (as most of the central plank is). Part of these texts (in ink) is partly covered by smears of white paint (fig. 5).

In the left unpainted area one can read (all in ink):

Dragone de la guyane

D. guyanensis

envoye de Cayenne

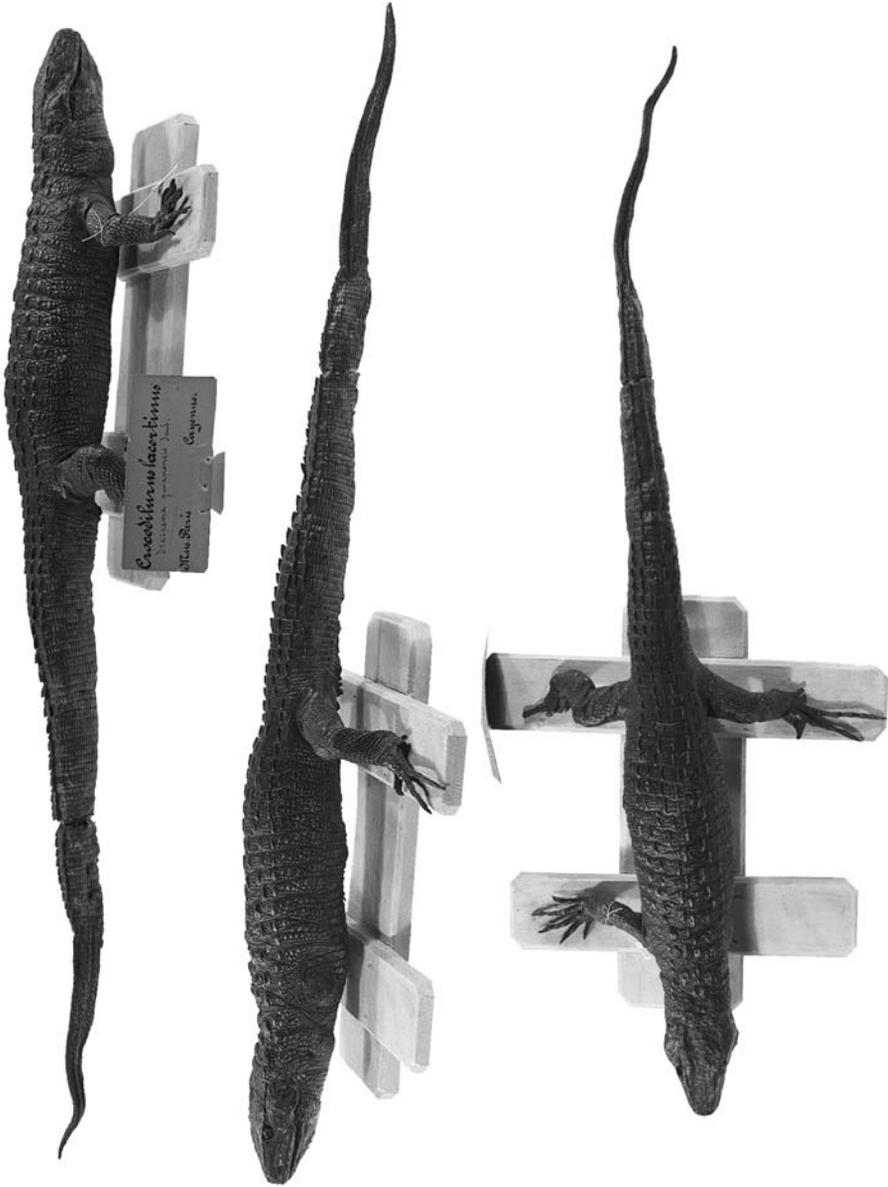


Fig. 1. RMNH 28888, *Dracaena guianensis* Daudin, 1801. From top to bottom left side view, dorsal view and right side view of stuffed holotype.

par M° de la Borde

The first letter of Cayenne looks like a capital G was first written, which subsequently was changed into a capital C (fig. 5).

In the right unpainted area one can read (all in ink, except where noted differently):

La grande Dragonne Cuv.

La Dragon Lacep. Quad. Ovip. pl.IX

Tejus [in pencil]

~~Monitor~~ crocodilus Merr.

Mus. a Paris

1835

To the left of the text there is a large sign which looks like a capital letter S leaning backwards, but turned 90° looks like a capital letter L, written in pencil. If we would interpret this sign as a capital S indeed, it looks completely different from the way Schlegel, who worked in the RMNH between 1825 and 1884 and in 1835 was responsible for the herpetological collections, wrote a capital S. So it probably is not his handwriting (fig. 5).

Under the plank used to support the hindlimbs, under the left hindlimb the number 84 is written in pencil. Possibly meant to be a register number, but never effectuated as such in the present RMNH collections and registernumber system (fig. 5).

In the archives of the RMNH one of us (MSH) found a list, signed by H. Schlegel and dated June 1835, detailing the material that was received in Leiden as exchange from the Paris museum. Under number 68 is listed "La grande Dragonne de Lacep. (ind[ividu] emp[ailé])."

All these data combined make it very likely, rather undeniable, that the stuffed specimen in Leiden (RMNH 28888) is the original specimen on which La Cèpède (1788) based his description of "La Dragonne".

The measurements taken from the available material and compared with data from the literature (table 1) show that RMNH 28888 in most measurements indeed is close to, or identical with, the measurements of the specimen described (and measured) by La Cèpède (1788) and Daudin (1801). Also, some head measurements of

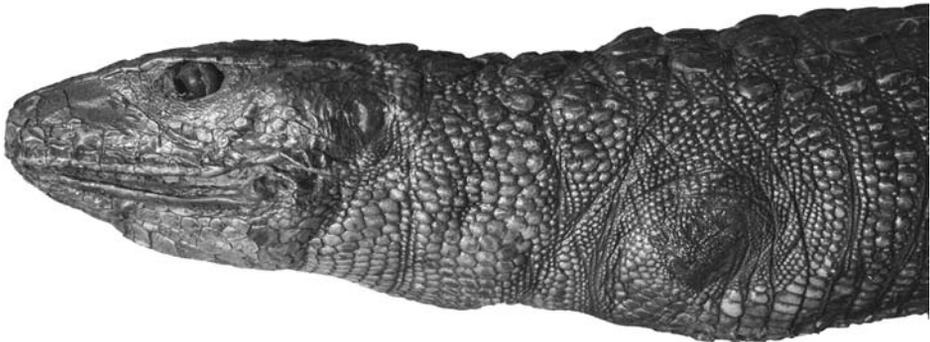


Fig. 2. RMNH 28888, *Dracaena guianensis* Daudin, 1801, holotype, detail of head and left side of the body, showing the scar at insertion of left forelimb.

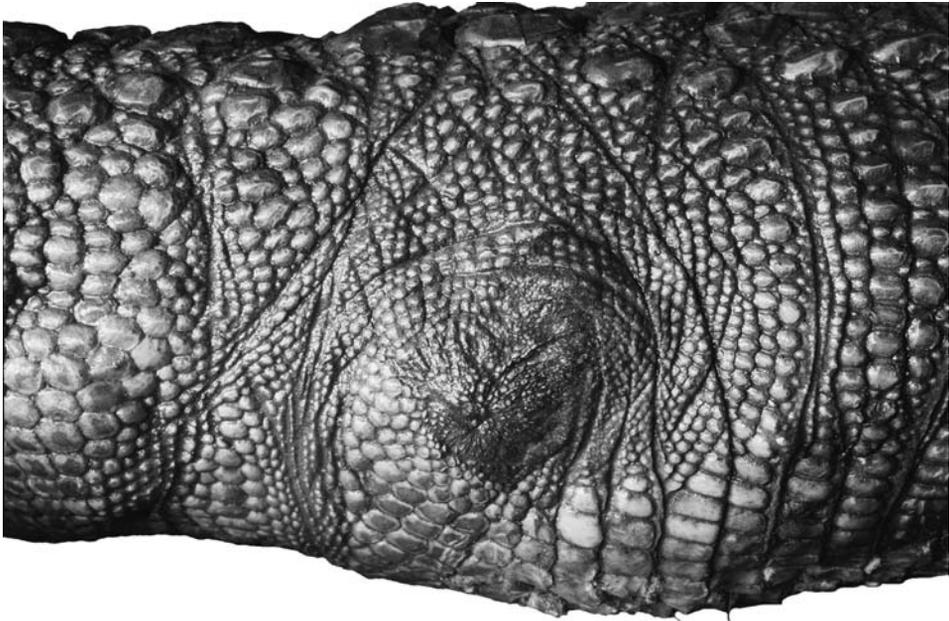


Fig. 3. RMNH 28888, *Dracaena guianensis* Daudin, 1801, holotype, detail of scar at insertion of left forelimb.

RMNH 28888 closely agree with those of the skull (MNHN-AC 2000.242) (see below). RMNH 28888 is a stuffed specimen (fig. 1) which lacks the skull and the axial skeleton, only the bones in the limbs are still present (checked by X-raying the specimen). The body and limbs are supported by thick ironwire, with which the specimen also is attached to the planks on which it is mounted. It is in relatively good condition, but some damage is evident: the right forelimb is complete, all fingers are present; the left foot lacks the 2nd and most of the fifth toe; the right foot lacks toes 1, 2, 3 and 5, and most of 4; the tail has been broken (and repaired again) at cm 19.5 and there the filling material is visible over a distance of 4 to 5 mm; the shape of the head is rather asymmetrical and irregular, due to the fact that the skull has been removed; the mouth on both sides is slightly opened and shows filling material; the eyes have been replaced by round beads, the one on the left is quite visible, the one on the right is covered by the lower eyelid. As stated before, the left forelimb is missing, due to some accident that happened to the animal while still alive, as the scar where the limb has been severed is neatly healed with skin, showing more or less radially arranged small scales (granules) of slightly variable size. The scar has a diameter of 16.3 mm and agrees with the general description of it given by La Cépède (1788) (figs 2, 3). The tail is regenerated from cm 26.5, a character also recognisable in the drawings published by La Cépède (1788, 1799) and Daudin (1801). From the fact that this specimen was exchanged with the Leiden museum we might conclude that at the time of exchange the Paris museum already had a second specimen of the species, viz. MNHN 8735. The fact that the drawing of La dragonne in La Cépède (1788) seems to show an animal facing left, with a left forelimb, does not mean much, as the picture probably was

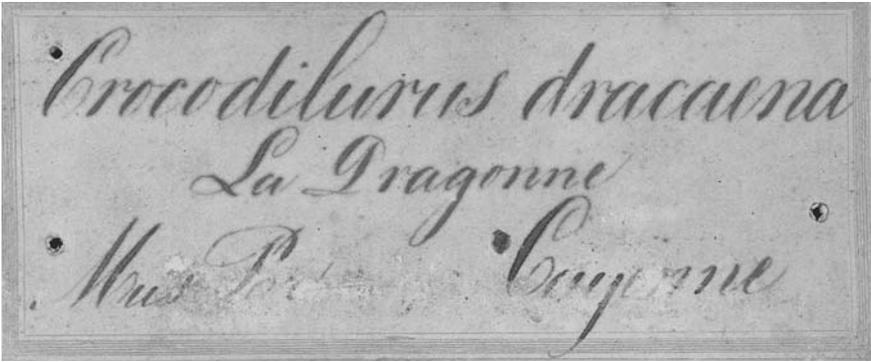


Fig. 4. Red-edged label attached to bottom of central plank on which the stuffed holotype of *Dracaena guianensis* Daudin, 1801 (RMNH 28888) is mounted.

printed in mirror-image as happened often. This is made more likely by the fact that in the 1799 edition of *La Cépède*, published in Dordrecht, the same plate is used again, but this time it is printed the other way, the animal facing right and apparently showing a right forelimb. Also Daudin (1801) gives a picture in which the animal is facing right, and showing a right forelimb. In all pictures two hindlimbs are recognisable, but only one forelimb, which might possibly reflect the fact that the left forelimb is absent.

Now that it has become clear that RMNH 28888 lacks a skull, the fact that a skull (MNHN-AC 2000.242) prepared and drawn by George Cuvier (1824), was found in the Laboratoire d'Anatomie comparée du Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, becomes extra interesting. The skull (figs 6, 7) was sent from Paris to Leiden for a direct comparison with the stuffed specimen. Already at first view it was clear that the skull matched the stuffed specimen very well and this was corroborated by the measurements taken (table 1). The skull is slightly damaged in the occipital area: the posterior part of the parietal on the left hand side is missing (cut off along an oblique line, from anterolateral to posteromedial); on the left hand side the posterior part of the postocular and the squamosal are missing; on the right hand side the postocular and part of the parietal (small chip in the middle) are missing. The premaxillary teeth are small and pointed, the anterior five or six maxillary teeth are also small and pointed, the posterior five maxillary teeth are enlarged and rounded, with the last one very much smaller than the preceding four. The first four mandibular teeth are small and pointed, teeth 5-7 are intermediate and 8-12 are flattened, with the last one distinctly smaller than the preceding four.

Thus, *La Cépède's* original specimen still exists and now is divided over two museums: the stuffed body with the bones of the limbs still in it in Leiden (RMNH 28888) and the (slightly damaged) skull and the two mandibles in Paris (MNHN-AC 2000.242). Together these parts form the holotype of Daudin's *Dracaena guianensis* and could be considered "schizotypes", a rather unusual occurrence in herpetological specimens.

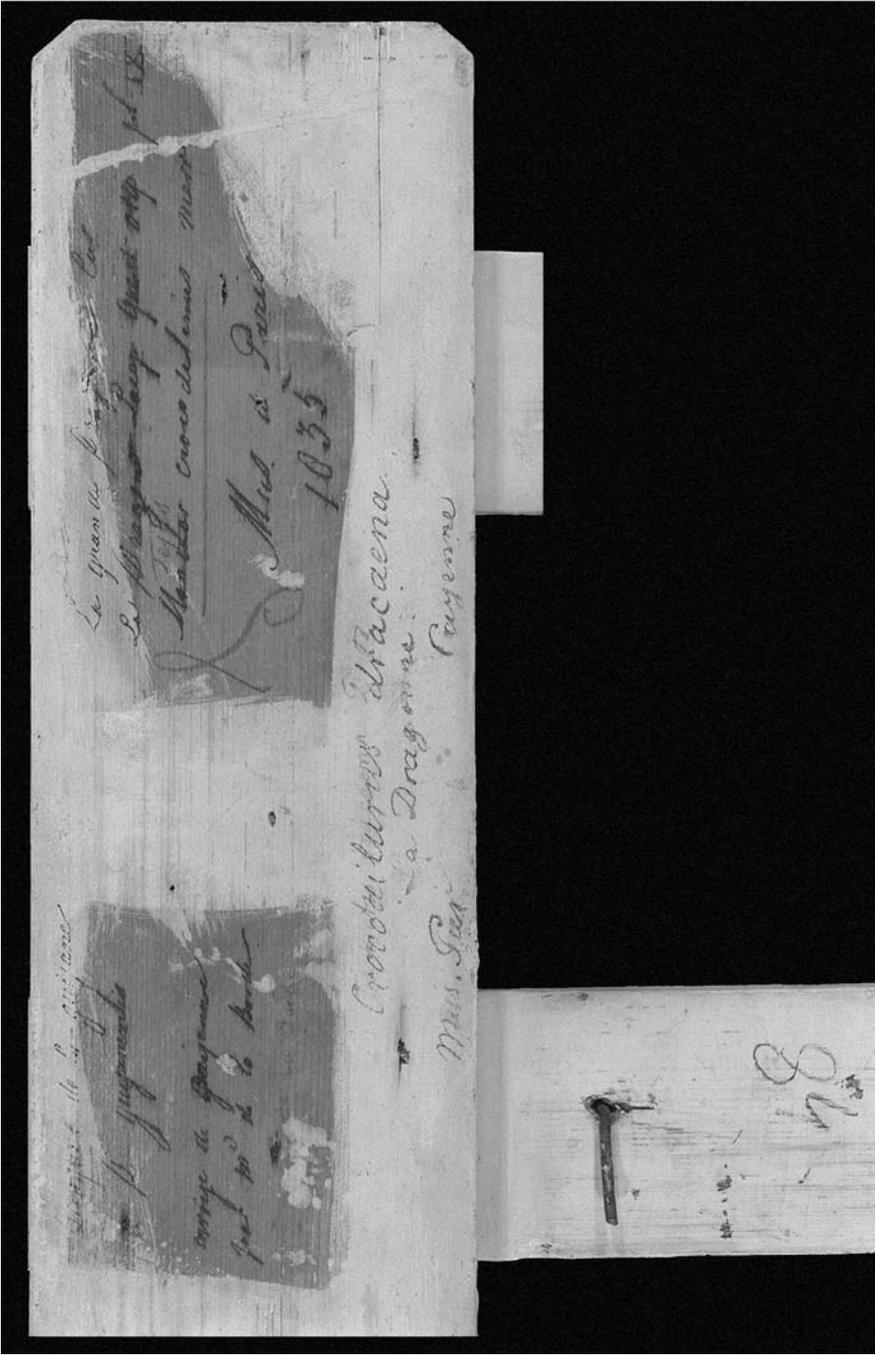


Fig. 5. RMNH 28888, *Dracaena guianensis* Daudin, 1801, holotype, view of tekst on bottom of planks on which stuffed specimen is mounted, after removal of the red-edged label shown in fig. 4.

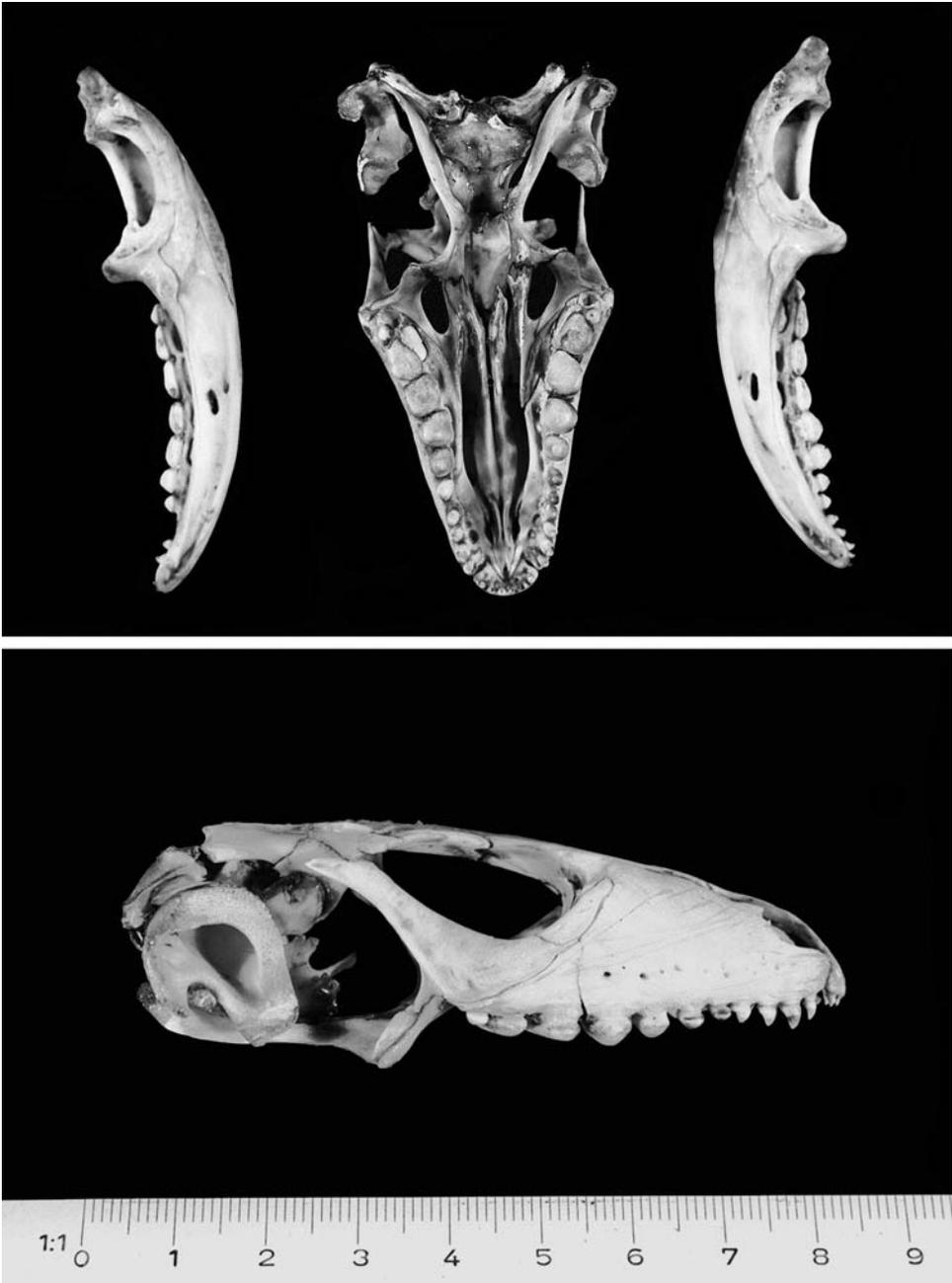


Fig. 6. Ventral and right lateral view of skull and interior view of mandibles of the holotype of *Dracaena guianensis* Daudin, 1801 (MNHN-AC 2000.242) kept at the Laboratoire d'Anatomie comparée du Muséum nationale d'histoire naturelle de Paris.

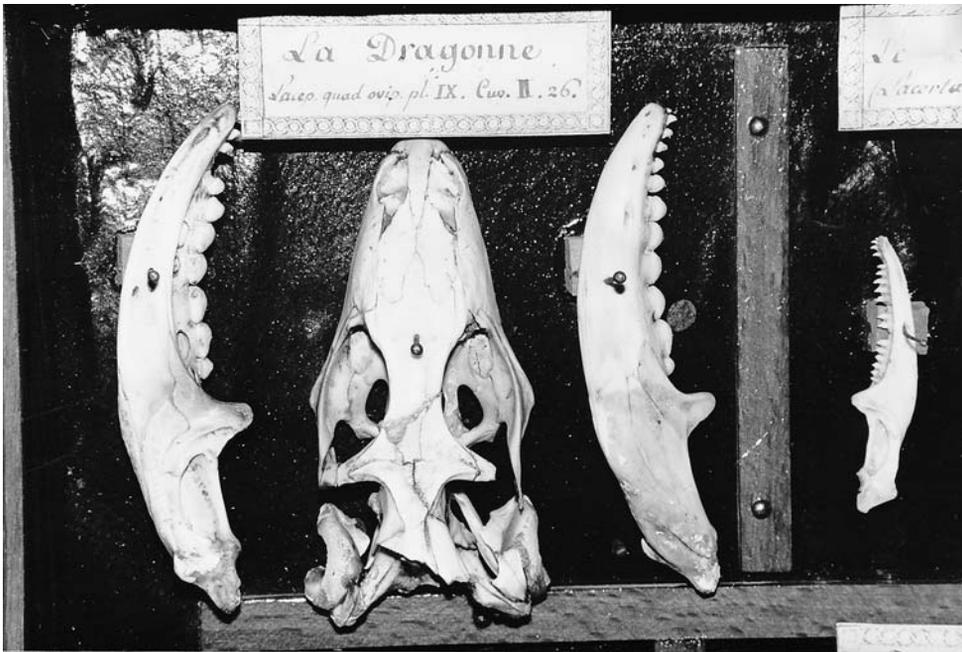


Fig. 7. Dorsal view of skull and mandibles of the holotype of *Dracaena guianensis* Daudin, 1801 (MNHN-AC 2000.242) kept at the laboratoire d'Anatomie comparée du Muséum nationale d'histoire naturelle de Paris in a box with skulls prepared by Cuvier (photo J.-C. de Massary).

On the origin of MNHN 8735

Duméril & Bibron (1839: 59) gave a total length of 790 mm for the specimen they described ; but this is inconsistent with the other size data they provided. Indeed, as noted first by Brygoo (1989: 39), the addition of the different measurements given by Duméril and Bibron, head plus neck plus trunk plus tail, yields 940 mm and not 790 mm. These latter authors probably omitted to take into account the head and neck length so that they would only get 790 mm. Except for the total length, all the measures we took on MNHN 8735 correspond well with the size data presented by Duméril & Bibron (Table 1) so that we do not doubt that this specimen was the one described by these authors.

Duméril & Bibron (1839: 60) also indicated "Nous avons peu de choses à dire sur le mode de coloration de cette espèce, dont nous n'avons jamais vu que des individus desséchés"; from this phrase, we conclude that they saw more than one specimen, but we do not know exactly how many ; further down the text, they added "le Muséum d'histoire naturelle l'a anciennement reçu de la Guyane par les soins de M. de Laborde [sic]; mais depuis, elle ne s'est jamais trouvée dans aucune des collections qui nous ont été adressées de ce pays." which means that, whatever the number of specimens they had, they apparently were of the opinion these were all sent by La Borde from Cayenne. Apparently they did not see any specimens in other shipments from French Guiana. Therefore, we could assume that MNHN 8735 also came from French Guiana

and was (possibly) also sent by La Borde, just like the type specimen. We only could ascertain that Raymond de La Borde (or Raymond de Laborde), born in 1725, arrived in French Guiana on March 18, 1769 on board of the ship "L'Amphitron" that arrived from Bordeaux, France and stayed there at least till 1776. There apparently is some information indicating he still was in French Guiana in 1782. He died in 1786 (possibly in French Guiana). No other information on him is available to us at the moment. From the scant information above it is however, certain that La Borde could not have collected any material in French Guiana after 1801 (see below).



Fig. 8. Live *Dracaena guianensis* (not collected), 2 June 1996, at 4 meters height in a bush, Kaw river, French Guiana. (photo M. Blanc).

The historic data available, enable us to make a rough estimate of the period in which MNHN 8735 could have arrived in the Paris museum. We know that both La Cépède and Daudin saw only one (and the same) specimen; we thus can conclude that MNHN 8735 has arrived at the Paris Museum after 1801, the date of publication of the second volume of the *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière, des reptiles* by Daudin. From the fact (see above) that the specimen described by La Cépède was exchanged with the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie in June 1835, we may safely assume that at that time the Paris museum had more than one specimen and that the "least valuable" one (damaged, because it was missing one forelimb) was used for exchange and that MNHN 8735 was present at that time and thus had arrived somewhere between 1801 and June 1835, and could not have been collected by La Borde (see above).

In 1851, Duméril & Duméril reported only one specimen, the actual MNHN 8735, in the museum collections; this specimen remained the only complete *Dracaena* known in the Paris Museum collections until 1973.

On the type locality

Contrary to what Hoogmoed & Lescure (1975: 166) thought, Duméril & Bibron (1839: 60) did not doubt the origin of the La Borde's specimen; Duméril & Bibron just noted that this species was only known from Cayenne thanks to La Borde, that is all. The last part of their sentence (already cited above) established that the species was absent in other shipments (not sent by La Borde) from French Guiana. Because the ancient southern limit of French Guiana was the Rio Araguari and because there was no evidence of the occurrence of *Dracaena guianensis* within the present borders of French Guiana, Hoogmoed & Lescure (1975) logically concluded that the type locality "Cayenne" very probably was wrong; consequently, they corrected it to Amapá, north of the Rio Araguari, Brazil.

However, one of us (MB) recently took a picture of *Dracaena guianensis* in the wild at the Kaw river, north-eastern French Guiana, where the species is not very rare. Though the quality of the picture is not very good, the lizard in this picture (fig. 8) clearly can be recognised as a caiman-lizard; indeed, the dorsal heterogenous lepidosis and the large dispersed tubercles recalling caiman skin can easily be seen. Also the typical head shape, laterally compressed and flat above and the reddish colour of the head are recognisable.

Because of the ancient limits of the French Guianan territory, we cannot be absolutely certain that the specimen sent by La Borde to La Cepède was caught inside the actual limits of French Guiana; yet, in the light of the recent observation we cannot reject this possibility any longer. Therefore, the type locality correction made by Hoogmoed & Lescure (1975) can be repealed and we have to accept again Cayenne (= French Guiana) as the type locality of *Dracaena guianensis* Daudin, 1801. The recent picture also means that the distribution of the species is more extensive than thought before and that it is now possible to say that it occurs throughout Amazonia, essentially following the Amazon river and some of its principal (southern) tributaries, but in the northeastern part of its distribution extends its range north throughout (coastal) Amapá and reaches north-eastern French Guiana. A similar distribution has become known the past few years for other reptiles and amphibians as well.

Acknowledgements

We want to thank Dr T.C.S. Avila Pires for providing the Portuguese resumé. Figures 1–6 were made by Mr A. 't Hooft of the RMNH. We would like to thank Dr J.-P. Gasc (MNHN-AC = Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Anatomie Comparée, Paris) for loaning the MNHN skull and mandibles to MSH, thus enabling direct comparison with the RMNH stuffed specimen. The stuffed specimen RMNH 28888 was X-rayed by Mr P. Snelderwaard of the Zoological Laboratory (v. d. Klaauw Laboratory) of the Leiden University. JCM wants to thank Dr J. Lescure and Dr A. Dubois for stimulating discussions on the subject. He also wants to thank Dr J.-P. Gasc and Dr I. Ineich for reviewing an earlier draft of this paper. Mrs Monique Pouliquen of the central library of the MNHN provided biographic information on La Borde. The taxonomic work for this paper took place complementary to an ecological study on lizards led by JCM in French Guiana, and supported by Electricité de France (EDF) (convention EDF/MNHN GP 7531). MNHN is the acronym for the general collection of the Muséum nationale d'Histoire naturelle, Paris, France, and RMNH for National Museum of Natural History, Leiden, The Netherlands.

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Received: 17.iii.2000

Accepted: 4.iv.2000

Edited: R. de Jong