



A PROPOSAL TO RETAIN *MASTICOPHIS* AS THE GENERIC NAME FOR THE COACHWHIP AND WHIPSNAKES

Recently, Utiger et al. (2005) generated a phylogenetic arrangement using two partially sequenced mitochondrial genes (12S rRNA and COI) from three taxa, and proposed placing the genus *Masticophis* in the synonymy of the genus *Coluber*. In Kansas, this would change the scientific name of the Coachwhip from *Masticophis flagellum* to *Coluber flagellum*, and would affect many additional taxa in the United States and adjacent Mexico.

As our new book on the Kansas herpetofauna nears completion, the decision on whether or not to incorporate Utiger's recommendation has been put off as long as possible. We are in contact with systematists in possession of data bearing directly on this issue (Frank T. Burbrink, pers. comm.). It is likely that while the Kansas herpetofaunal book is in press (or soon after its publication), the taxonomy of this group will revert back to some semblance of its current usage. Therefore, continued recognition of the genus *Masticophis* will be followed by us.

Additionally, it is hoped that future studies recommending changes to this group would include a much more thorough sampling of the extant taxa.

While Utiger's work illustrated the paraphyly of *Masticophis flagellum* with respect to *Coluber constrictor*, the taxonomic sampling was incomplete such that the unsampled taxa within *Coluber* and *Masticophis* (*C. mormon*, *M. bilineatus*, *M. lateralis*, and *M. schotti*) could not be adequately addressed; their inclusion might have revealed alternative taxonomic arrangements that were less radical.

Literature Cited

Utiger U., B. Schätti & N. Helfenberger
2005. The oriental colubrine genus *Coelognathus* Fitzinger, 1843 and classification of Old and New World racers and rat snakes (Reptilia, Squamata, Colubridae, Colubrinae). *Russian Journal of Herpetology* 12 (1): 39–60.

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