

## THE TAXONOMIC STATUS OF *Lacerta composita* MÉHELY, 1909 (SQUAMATA: SAURIA: LACERTIDAE)

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The purpose of this work, under Articles 23.9.1.2, 23.9.2, and 24.2 of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature, is to conserve the priority of the specific name *Lacerta mixta* Méhely, 1909. This name is threatened by the never-used-as-valid name *Lacerta composita* Méhely, 1909. It is proposed that *Lacerta mixta*, Méhely, 1909 is given precedence as a nomen protectum over *Lacerta composita* Méhely, 1909, which will be considered as a nomen oblitum.

**Keywords:** nomenclature; Georgia; rock lizards; *Darevskia mixta*; nomen oblitum; nomen protectum.

In 1909, the Hungarian zoologist Lajos Méhely (Ludwig von Méhely in its German form; 1862 – 1953) published “Materialien zu einer Systematik und Phylogenie der *muralis*-ähnlichen Lacerten.” In this publication, Méhely provided detailed descriptions of several forms of lizards (synonyms, general morphology, size, color, scalation, skull structure), especially of the Caucasus and surrounding areas.

In his footnote to the sentence “Das erwachsene Männchen hat niemals so kräftig entwickelte, grosse Femoralporen wie bei *Lacerta saxicola* und den meisten *Lacerta*-Arten” on page 564, Méhely mentioned that this form might be a hybrid and noted: “Ein gutes Unterscheidungsmerkmal gegenüber *Lacerta saxicola gracilis*, bei welcher Unterart schon die jüngeren und kleineren Männchen kräftigere Femoralporen besitzen als die älteren und grösseren von *Lacerta caucasica*. Das erwachsene ♂ vom Tana-Thal hat beiderseits 20 grosse, kräftig entwickelte Femoralporen! Da dieses Stück auch in anderen Charakteren (längere Gliedmassen, acht Ventralreihen, 3 – 4 Schuppenreihen auf die Länge einer Bauchplatte, am Schenkel mehr Schildchenreihen) ziemlich abweicht, liegt die Vermuthung nahe, dass es ein Bastard zwischen *Lacerta caucasica* und *L. saxicola* var. *Defilippii* sein kann. Sollte es sich für eine besondere Art entpuppen, würde ich dieselbe *Lacerta composita* nennen” (Fig. 1). According to the International Code of the Zoological Nomenclature (1999), this has to be considered as a available name (Article 11), even if the author sug-

gested some doubts about its validity as a species. The unique specimen reported in the text must be considered to be the holotype by monotypy (Article 73.1.2). It was stored in the Caucasian Museum (Tiflis, Georgia); now the National Museum of Georgia (NMG, Tbilisi, Georgia), where it still remains.

In his list of specimens of *Lacerta derjugini* [= *Darevskia derjugini* (Nikolsky, 1898)], Méhely (1909) noted three other lizards collected from the same locality: “Drei semiadulte Stücke vom Tana-Thal (Kreis Lenkoran?) leg. König (Mus[eum]. Caucas[us]., Nr. 26. b.)” (p. 573). In the catalogue of the collections of the Caucasian Museum (Radde, 1899), there are four lizards registered under number No. 26b, all collected in July 1895 by E. G. König, but they are noted as belonging to the species *Lacerta muralis* Laurenti, 1768.

The publication of Méhely (1909) was highly respected by the leading Russian herpetologist at that time, Alexander M. Nikolsky, who in general shared Méhely’s points of view on the systematics of the tribe Lacertini; however, Nikolsky did not make any personal conclusion about the status of *Lacerta composita* (Nikolsky, 1913, 1915).

The leading world expert on rock lizards, Ilya S. Darevsky, drew the following conclusion from the text of Méhely (1909): “Apparently, the adult male of a rock lizard from the Atensky Gorge in Georgia described by Méhely (1909) is a possible hybrid species, *Lacerta composita*” (p. 109, Darevsky, 1967, in translation from the original Russian) and considered that it belonged to the subspecies *Lacerta rudis obscura* [= *Darevskia rudis ob-*

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parative study and in this condition individual or specific differences are difficult to discriminate. Boulenger (1920) provided data by Louis A. Lantz, who was the first scientist to consider *Lacerta mixta* and *L. composita* to be conspecific (Boulenger, 1920, p. 282). Following Lantz, Boulenger (1920) considered these forms as indistinguishable and placed both in the synonymy of *Lacerta saxicola* var. *chalybdea* Eichwald, 1831.

Therefore, the name *Lacerta composita* has never been used as a valid name; contrary to the name *Lacerta mixta*, which has been used as a valid name in numerous papers (more than 25 times), published by different authors (more than 10), over the last 50 years and, therefore, encompassing a span of not less than 10 years (*Appendix*). As far as I know, all conditions of Articles 23.9.1.2 and 23.9.2 of the Code are met for the reversal of the priority of the never-used *L. composita*. On the basis of the Principle of First Reviser (Article 24.2) for stabilization of the nomenclature, I here recommend to designate the name *Lacerta composita* Méhely, 1909 (Type locality: Tana Valley River, Shida Kartli Region, Georgia, the place of collection of holotype — NMG 269) as a nomen oblitum, and the name *Lacerta mixta* Méhely, 1909 (Type locality: Abastumani, Samtskhe-Javakheti Region, Georgia, the place of collection of the lectotype designated by R. Mertens (1967) — SMF 12087) as a nomen protectum.

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Fig. 3. The holotype of *Lacerta composita* Méhely, 1909 (NMG 269).

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## APPENDIX

The list of publications containing the name *Lacerta mixta* Méhely, 1909 [= *Darevskia mixta* (Méhely, 1909)]: 26 works, published by many authors (many more than 10) in the immediately preceding 50 years and encompassing a span of not less than 10 years

- Ananjeva N. B., Orlov N. L., Khalikov R. G., Darevsky I. S., Ryabov S. A., and Barabanov A. V.** (2006), *The Reptiles of Northern Eurasia. Taxonomic Diversity, Distribution, Conservation Status. Pensoft Series Faunistica. Vol. 47*, Pensoft, Sofia.
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- Arnold E. N., Arribas O., and Carranza S.** (2007) "Systematics of the Palearctic and Oriental lizard tribe Lacertini (Squamata: Lacertidae: Lacertinae), with descriptions of eight new genera," *Zootaxa*, 1430, 1 – 86.
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- Grechko V. V., Ciobanu D. G., Darevsky I. S., Kosushkin S. A., and Kramerov D. A.** (2006), "Molecular evolution of satellite DNA repeats and speciation of lizards of the genus *Darevskia* (Sauria: Lacertidae)," *Genome*, **49**(10), 1297 – 1307.
- Jancúchová-Lásková J., Landová E., and Frynta D.** (2015), "Are genetically distinct lizard species able to hybridize? A review," *Curr. Zool.*, **61**(1), 155 – 180.
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