**Tropidophis celiae** Hedges, Estrada, and Díaz 1999

*Canasí Trope*

*Tropidophis celiae* Hedges, Estrada, and Díaz 1999:376. Type locality, “from the northern (coastal) side of Loma Canasi [Canasí], at the mouth of Rio Canasi [Río Canasí], Santa Cruz del Norte Municipality, La Habana [currently Mayabeque] Province, Cuba, 23°08'37"N, 81°46'40"W, 3 m a.s.l.” Holotype, Museo Nacional de Historia Natural de Cuba (MNHNCu) 4474, an adult female, collected by Alberto R. Estrada and Luis M. Díaz on 7 June 1996.

**CONTENT.** No subspecies are recognized.

**DESCRIPTION.** *Tropidophis celiae* is a medium-sized tropidophiid; the largest individual is an adult male with a snout-vent length (SVL) of 421 mm collected at Carboneras, Matanzas in 2004 (specimen lost, see Remarks) and the largest known female has a SVL of 350 mm (Torres et al. 2013). The following characters are based on the original description by Hedges et al. (1999) and data presented by Hedges (2002), Torres et al. (2013), and Torres López et al. (2016). The body is robust and the head is wider than the neck. Head scales include parietal scales in contact (separated by one scale in the holotype), 9–10 supralabials (4–5 in contact with the eye), 10–12 infralabials, 1 preocular, and 3 postoculars. Dorsal scales are smooth and in 25–27–19 rows (behind the head, at midbody, and immediately anterior to the vent, respectively). Middorsal scales are not enlarged except a few scales at the posterior end of the body and on the tail. Ventrals number 196–203, subcaudals 30–35. Adult males have well-developed pelvic spurs that retract into small grooves. Dorsal color in life is brown or dark gray in the dark phase and yellowish-gray to tan in the light phase; the venter is pale and cream-colored. The head is yellowish and the tongue is red with a white tip. Head markings include two adjacent interocular bars (dark behind and yellow in the front), an hourglass-shaped mark extending from the interocular bars to the light nuchal band, and a brown band across the snout and nares. The dorsal pattern consists of 47–60 pairs of large, partially fused spots along the dorsal midline, and smaller, irregularly aligned, and less contrasting spots on the flanks, resulting in 8 ‘rows’ of spots around midbody. The tip of the tail is yellowish, reddish, or orange. The venter is immaculate or with sparse and widely spaced spots on the borders of some ventral scales.
**DIAGNOSIS.** *Tropidophis cæliae* was included in the *Tropidophis melanurus* group by Hedges (2002); this group also includes *Tropidophis bucculentus, Tropidophis canus, Tropidophis caymanensis, Tropidophis curtus, Tropidophis melanurus, Tropidophis parkeri,* and *Tropidophis schwartzii.* The combination of high ventral count (196–203) and midbody scale row count (27) in *Tropidophis cæliae* distinguishes it from all species in the genus except *Tropidophis caymanensis* and *Tropidophis melanurus* (Hedges et al. 1999). *Tropidophis cæliae* (421 mm maximum SVL) is smaller than *Tropidophis caymanensis* and *Tropidophis melanurus* (470 mm and 957 mm maximum SVL, respectively; Hedges 2002; Hedges et al. 1999; Torres et al. 2013). Although *Tropidophis cæliae* and *Tropidophis hendersoni* are assigned to different species groups (the latter was assigned to the *Tropidophis pardalis* group by Hedges 2002), they are quite similar in general appearance (Torres et al. 2017). The head is wider in *Tropidophis hendersoni* (1.45 head/neck width ratio versus 1.31 in *Tropidophis cæliae*). The pale neckband (fused occipital spots) is more obvious in *Tropidophis cæliae,* and *Tropidophis hendersoni* has a salmon-colored ventral ground color (Díaz et al. 2014), whereas the venter is cream in *Tropidophis cæliae* (Hedges et al. 1999; Torres et al. 2013).

**PHYLOGENETIC RELATIONSHIPS.** Based on unpublished molecular data, *Tropidophis cæliae* was placed in the *Tropidophis melanurus* group by Hedges (2002) and Hedges et al. (1999). In an unpublished molecular phylogeny of nine species representing all Cuban species groups
(following Hedges 2002), Torres López (2009) determined that *Tropidophis celiae* and *Tropidophis melanurus* were sister species in a genetically distinct clade.

**PUBLISHED DESCRIPTIONS.** Detailed descriptions based solely on the holotype were provided by Hedges (2002) and Hedges et al. (1999). Descriptions based on additional specimens were published by Torres López (2009), Torres et al. (2013), and Torres López et al. (2016); descriptions of neonates were provided by Torres López et al. (2016).

**ILLUSTRATIONS.** A **black-and-white photograph** of the holotype was provided by Hedges et al. (1999). This same photograph was published in **color**, along with a close-up of the head, by Hedges (2017). The same color photograph of CZACC 4.5582 was presented by Rodríguez Schettino (2012), Rivalta-G. et al. (2013), and Rodríguez-S. et al. (2015). Color photographs of MFP 12.505 and CZACC 4.5582 were published by Torres et al. (2013). Color photographs of an adult and two neonates were presented by Torres López et al. (2016).

**DISTRIBUTION.** *Tropidophis celiae* is known only from the type locality and one other location (Carboneras) about 36.5 km to the southeast. The region is a sub-coastal karstic area with abundant caves, many with sinkholes that allow sunshine to enter and shrubs and vines to grow in some chambers. The vegetation at the type locality of Canasí is predominantly succulent scrubland on coastal limestone bordered by a tree strip composed mainly of Seagrapes (*Coccoloba uvifera*) with abundant soil and leaf litter. Farther inland, semi-deciduous forest coincides with the increasing slope of the hills. Despite abundant soil and litter, most of the trees are small and palms are abundant. At Carboneras, the

**Figure 2.** Gravid female *Tropidophis celiae* from Canasí, Mayabeque Province, Cuba. Photograph by Raimundo López-Silvero Martínez (from Torres López et al. 2016).
vegetation near the collecting sites is semi-deciduous forest on karst, which appears to be more suitable for *Tropidophis celiae*. This forest persists only around cave entrances where temperatures are moderated and humidity is high (Torres López et al. 2016). The distribution was illustrated by Rodríguez Schettino (2012), Rodríguez Schettino et al. (2013), Uetz et al. (2016), and Hedges (2017).

**FOSSIL RECORD.** No fossils are known.

**PERTINENT LITERATURE.** In addition to the original description published by Hedges et al. (1999) and the revision of the genus by Hedges (2002), the morphology and coloration of additional individuals was described by Torres et al. (2013), who also described a second locality. Data on parturition and husbandry were presented by Torres López et al. (2016).

The species was included in checklists, general works, articles focusing on other species, or faunal accounts by Anonymous (1999), Domínguez Díaz and Moreno García (2003), Estrada (2012), González Alonso et al. (2012), Hallermann et al. (2000), Hedges (2017), Henderson and Powell (2007, 2009), Hutchins et al. (2003), Rodríguez Schettino and Rivalta González (2003), Rodríguez-S. et al. (2015), Uetz et al. (2016), and Wallach et al. (2014). See **Remarks** for information on the conservation status of the species.

**REMARKS.** A specimen (now lost) repre-

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**Figure 3.** Female *Tropidophis celiae* with her clutch from Canasí, Mayabeque Province, Cuba. Scale bar = 10 mm. Photograph by Tomás M. Rodríguez Cabrera (from Torres López et al. 2016).
Although technically adhering to rules set out in the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (1999), the journal in which these innovations appeared is not peer-reviewed and the author has a history of exploiting the work of others to create new names that do little more than complicate the taxonomy of those groups he chooses to address (Kaiser 2014; Kaiser et al. 2013). Consequently, we choose not to recognize his taxonomic innovations.

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JAVIER TORRES, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas 66045, USA (javiertorres@ku.edu), ROBERT POWELL, Department of Biology, Avila University, Kansas City, MO 64145, USA (robert.powell@avila.edu), and ALBERTO R. ESTRADA, 13355 SW 9th Ct., Apt. 415H, Pembroke Pines, FL 33027, USA (peleuth@gmail.com).

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