

***Batrachus uranoscopus* Guichenot, 1866 supposedly from Madagascar, is not a threatened species of toadfish (Batrachoididae)**

by

Bruce B. COLLETTE (1) & David W. GREENFIELD (2)

RÉSUMÉ. - *Batrachus uranoscopus* Guichenot, 1866 prétendument originaire de Madagascar, n'est pas une espèce menacée de poisson-crapaud tacheté (Batrachoididae).

Batrachus uranoscopus Guichenot, 1866 prétendument originaire de Madagascar, est en réalité le synonyme le plus récent de *Thalassophryne maculosa* Günther, 1861 provenant du nord de l'Amérique du sud et devrait être retiré de la liste rouge IUCN des espèces vulnérables, ainsi que de la liste de l'ichtyofaune de Madagascar.

Key words. - Batrachoididae - *Batrachus uranoscopus* - *Thalassophryne maculosa* - Madagascar - Junior synonym - Red List.

While examining specimens at the Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle in Paris, the second author found several specimens of a toadfish from Madagascar that represented an undescribed species later described as *Allenbatrachus meridionalis* Greenfield & Smith, 2004. He also examined the type of another toadfish, supposedly from Madagascar, *Batrachus uranoscopus* Guichenot 1866, MNHN 4162, and suspected that it was really a specimen of a western Atlantic species of *Thalassophryne*.

Other than the original description, there is no other reference to *Batrachus uranoscopus* in the *Catalog of Fishes* (Eschmeyer, 2008) and we know of no subsequent reference to specimens under this name except for its inclusion on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species as Vulnerable B1ab (i,iii) + 2ab (i,iii) based on a 2001 assessment (Loiselle, 2004). This assessment was justified by Loiselle based on its supposedly limited distribution in the Rantabe, Antanambalana, and other rivers flowing into Antongil Bay, Madagascar but these distributional records were shown to be based on *Allenbatrachus meridionalis* (Greenfield and Smith, 2004).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Locality

According to MNHN records (R. Causse, pers. comm.), the holotype was collected by a Mr. Goudot in Madagascar in 1843. Five lots of fishes were received at the Paris museum from Mr. Goudot: three lots from Madagascar (*Ambassis gymnocephalus* in 1833, *Rhinecanthus aculeatus* and *Paretroplus polyactis*), one from Martinique (*Antennarius striatus*), and the holotype of *Batrachus uranoscopus*.

Meristics

Photographs and X-ray photographs of the type show that the type has only two dorsal-fin spines as Guichenot stated in the original description, indicating that it belongs to one of the two Neotropical subfamilies of toadfishes, *Thalassophryninae* or *Porichthyinae* (Collette, 1966, 2003) and not to the world-wide *Batrachoidinae*, all species of which have three dorsal-fin spines. Examination of the holotype by Romain Causse reveals that the dorsal spines are hollow, diagnostic of the subfamily *Thalassophryninae*. The holotype lacks any subopercular spines, whereas members of the subfamily *Batrachoidinae* have one to three. Also, the holotype has a distinctive upturned mouth typical of *Thalassophryne* species and unlike any species in the *Batrachoidinae*. There are 16 or 17 second dorsal- and 17 or 18 anal fin-rays, agreeing well with the original description. These counts are much too low for any species of *Porichthys* (second dorsal 29-39, anal 27-37) but agree well with those for a species of *Thalassophryne*, *T. maculosa* Günther, 1861 (second dorsal 17-20, anal 16-19). Counts of caudal vertebrae (21) also agree well with those for *T. maculosa* (19-22). The Madagascar toadfish *Allenbatrachus meridionalis* has 22 dorsal-fin rays (Greenfield and Smith, 2004), a few more than the type of *Batra-*



Figure 1. - *Thalassophryne maculosa*, holotype of *Batrachus uranoscopus*, MNHN 4162 (Photo by C. Ferrara/MNHN).

- (1) National Marine Fisheries Service Systematics Laboratory, National Museum of Natural History, Washington, DC 20560, USA. [collett@si.edu]
- (2) California Academy of Sciences, 55 Concourse Drive, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, CA 94118-4599, USA.

chus uranoscopus or than *Thalassophryne maculosa*.

Pigment pattern

Thalassophryne maculosa has the dorsal, anal, pectoral, and caudal fins pigmented to the distal margins, and does not have pale distal margins to the fins as do *T. montevidensis* and *T. nattereri*. Although *T. maculosa* shows great variation in the number and shape of the spots and blotches that cover the body and pectoral fins, it always has prominent spots or blotches (Collette, 1966, fig. 6), not uniformly small spots as in *T. punctata*. Both the original description (“nombreuses taches roussâtres, de différentes grandeurs”) and photographs of the holotype (Fig. 1) fit the spotting pattern of this species. *Allenbatrachus meridionalis* lacks spots on the body and has patterns of light lines on the fins that are lacking in the holotype of *B. uranoscopus* and *T. maculosa*.

Distribution

Thalassophryne maculosa is common (more than 140 specimens examined, Collette, 1966) along the northern coast of South America off Colombia and Venezuela including the islands of Aruba, Curaçao, Margarita, Trinidad, and Tobago (but not from Martinique). Presence of a specimen of *Antennarius striatus* from Martinique makes it likely that the locality data for the type of *Batrachus uranoscopus* somehow became confused and that it probably originated in South America.

CONCLUSIONS

We believe that *Batrachus uranoscopus* Guichenot 1866 is a junior synonym of *Thalassophryne maculosa* Günther, 1861, a relatively common Western Atlantic toadfish. Thus, the name *Batrachus uranoscopus* should be removed from the Red List of vulnerable species and the name should be removed from the list of fishes known from Madagascar.

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