

WHY *Caucasilacerta* HARRIS, ARNOLD ET THOMAS, 1998 IS A NOMEN NUDUM?

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Caucasilacerta Harris, Arnold et Thomas, 1998 has been considered as a nomen nudum for the last 18 years. The main reason for this was the lack of a diagnosis or reference to it. Now, some authors argue that a paragraph in the same paper could be a valid diagnosis and thus *Caucasilacerta* might be an available valid name. In the present manuscript I demonstrate that *Caucasilacerta* is a nomen nudum by: a) the lack of diagnosis or reference to it accompanying (sic! mandatory in the ICZN) to the new name; b) the alleged diagnosis (fide Busack et al., 2016) is 102 lines away (two pages, including a figure and its legend) and there is not a reference to it accompanying the new name; and c) the subject of the alleged diagnosis are “the Rock-dwelling lacertids in the Caucasus” (sic!), different from the group to which the new name supposedly refers to, the “*L. saxicola* group” (sic!). A relationship between both names that can only be ascertained by a specialist in the group and the concerned geographic area. As a result of that, *Caucasilacerta* is a nomen nudum, unavailable, and thus it is not even a Junior Synonym of *Darevskia* Arribas, 1997.

Keywords: nomenclature; *Caucasilacerta*; *Darevskia*; nomen nudum; availability.

Harris, Arnold, and Thomas (1998) revised the lacertid relationships in a paper where they introduced two new names: *Caucasilacerta* and *Parvilacerta*. Both were nomina nuda, as there was no diagnosis accompanying the new names, and the latter also lacked a designation of the type species, both questions mandatory in the 1985 version of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (henceforth the Code). Moreover, both lacked the statement of a new nomenclatural act being made (as gen. nov.), although this was not mandatory in the 1985 version of the Code (hence in force).

Arnold, Arribas, and Carranza (2007) considered both nomina nuda (note that Arnold was an author of the Harris et al., 1998 paper), and redescribed *Parvilacerta* with new authors and date. This was not necessary for *Caucasilacerta*, as *Darevskia* Arribas, 1997 was an available name for this group. Thus, during the last 18 years *Caucasilacerta* has been considered a nomen nudum and therefore it has no place in the Zoological Nomenclature (as nomina nuda do not need to appear in synonymies, chresonymies, etc.).

Recently, a paper by Busack et al. (2016) has been published and even circulated still unpublished (as galley proofs in fact) and, among other questions that will be replied elsewhere, it mentions: “Arnold et al. (2007: 40) in-

correctly stated that the name *Caucasilacerta* was a nomen nudum. Harris et al. (1998: 1945) did indeed provide the following diagnostic elements for the *Lacerta saxicola* group, for which they proposed the name *Caucasilacerta*.” Moreover, they add “The name *Caucasilacerta* therefore cannot be rejected under Article 23.9, as it was used as valid at least once after its original description, namely in the paper by Sindaco et al. (2000).” The fact that *Caucasilacerta* was used or not in any paper is irrelevant as being a nomen nudum it has no place in Zoological Nomenclature. Moreover, as explained in the following lines, they are wrong in considering that the name has a valid diagnosis in accordance to the Code:

Harris et al. (1998) introduce first time the name *Caucasilacerta* in the following paragraph on page 1947 of the original paper: “In addition to the subgenera already in use, we propose *Caucasilacerta* (type species *Lacerta saxicola*) for the *L. saxicola* group and *Parvilacerta* for *L. parva* and *L. fraasi*.”

The allegedly diagnosis by Harris et al. (1998) sensu Busack et al. (2016) appears on page 1945 of the original paper, 102 lines away (two pages of text, including a figure and its legend) before the appearance of the new name. It has been transcribed below (I have underlined the diagnostic characters mentioned):

“Rock-dwelling lacertids in the Caucasus and surrounding regions, together with more disparate forms

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such as *L. praticola*, *L. derjugini* and *L. chlorogaster*, share some morphological features that are not common in other archaeolacertas. These include a single postnasal scale and a relatively high number of presacral vertebrae. Consequently, these lizards have been regarded as a distinct clade (Arnold, 1989a). The two morphologically different forms, *Lacerta saxicola* and *L. chlorogaster*, subjected to DNA sequence analysis here, appear as each others' closest relatives among the included species (bootstrap support is 100%). Other mtDNA analyses also support this clade (Fu et al., 1997)."

ICZN (1999) clearly states: (Art 13.1) "To be available, every new name published after 1930 must satisfy the provisions of Article 11 and must..." (Art 13.1.1) be accompanied by a description or definition that states in words characters that are purported to differentiate the taxon," or (Art 13.1.2) "be accompanied by a bibliographic reference to such a published statement." ICZN (1985) in force at that time mentions exactly the same, with the only exception of "scientific name" instead of "name."

"Accompanied" means "with," "companion for," "together with," "at the same time or along with," as can be seen, for instance, in Merriam-Webster Dictionary [<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/accompanied>] or Oxford dictionary [<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/accompany>] (consulted 6/10/2016) and it does not coincide with the situation in Harris et al. (1998) and the distance between the name and the ad-hoc considered diagnosis eighteen years later by Busack et al. (2016).

Moreover, the subject in the supposed diagnosis is the "Rock-dwelling lacertids in the Caucasus" (sic!) whereas in the first appearance of *Caucasilacerta* in the text, the concerned group and its contents is called the "*L. saxicola* group" (sic!). A lizard specialist can be aware

that they refer to the same collective, but this is not the case for other less specialized readers.

In consequence, there is no diagnosis, no reference to it in the same or other publication, the allegedly diagnosis is not accompanying the new name (in fact, it is far away) and, even more importantly, the authors used different names to refer to the collective group in the alleged diagnosis (sensu Busack et al., 2016) and in the nomenclatural act. The clear association between both cannot be made by anyone unfamiliar with the systematics of these small lacertid lizards. As a result of that, the name *Caucasilacerta*, introduced in an otherwise good and interesting phylogenetic paper, was, is, and will be, a nomen nudum, unavailable, and should not even be listed as a synonym of *Darevskia* Arribas, 1997.

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