

EREMIASCINCUS, A NEW GENERIC NAME FOR SOME
AUSTRALIAN SAND SWIMMING SKINKS
(LACERTILIA: SCINCIDAE)

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INTRODUCTION

Work on the systematics of any group of organisms above the species level has generally focused on the genus. Historically, this has been due in large part to the imperative of binomial nomenclature, i.e., every species must be placed in a genus, and, more recently, it has been due to the realization that the genus is an extremely useful biological concept when viewed as a monophyletic group of species showing strong morphological and ecological cohesiveness. A sound systematics at the generic level thus has both great practical and theoretical importance in the study of any group.

G. A. Boulenger (1887) established the foundations for the modern study of the systematics of scincid lizards in the third volume of his *Catalogue of Lizards*. In this work, Boulenger endeavoured to place all the known scincid species into rigorously diagnosed, monophyletic genera. To his apparent frustration, however, Boulenger was left at the end of his study with a large and diverse group of species that resisted further subdivision on the criteria he had applied to other genera. This group required a generic name, of course, and the name available was the now famous, or infamous, *Lygosoma*. Boulenger was not content with stopping at the required generic name, however, for to do so would have meant stifling his views on the several lineages hidden under the one name. Instead, he gave the different subgroups of *Lygosoma* subgeneric names, a procedure that was unprecedented in his treatment of other reptile groups¹.

Much of the subsequent history of skink systematics has been the relentless chipping away at this residual group of refractory skinks, often along the lines suggested by Boulenger's subgenera (Smith 1937, Mittleman 1952, Storr 1964 and Greer 1974 and 1977). In M. A. Smith's time (1937) this group was still known as *Lygosoma* but inevitably this name was applied to one of the small groups that was separated from the core, and the core then came to be known as *Sphenomorphus* (Mittleman 1952), the name by which it is known at present.

1. One of the consequences of combining a large number of species that had previously been described under other generic names into a single genus, of course, was to create many secondary homonyms. This in turn required many replacement names. Under Article 59C of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature these replacement names must be retained as the species are parcelled out into new and resurrected genera. However, in that Boulenger and all subsequent workers have been convinced that this genus contains several lineages that are equivalent to other genera but more difficult to diagnose, it would be appropriate for the Commission to suspend Article 59C with regard to *Lygosoma*.