

**Revision of the Small Tropical Whipsnakes  
Previously Referred to *Demansia olivacea* (Gray, 1842)  
and *Demansia torquata* (Günther, 1862)  
(Squamata: Elapidae)**

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**ABSTRACT.** *Demansia olivacea* and *Demansia torquata*, as used by recent authors, are composite. Nine species are recognized based on coloration and morphology, with evidence of sympatry between several pairs of species. *Demansia olivacea* is restricted to the northern Kimberley and the Top End of the Northern Territory and *D. torquata* to eastern coastal Queensland. *Demansia calodera* Storr, 1978 and *Demansia rufescens* Storr, 1978, originally described as subspecies of *D. olivacea*, are raised to full species. *Demansia angusticeps* (Macleay, 1888), previously regarded as a synonym of *D. olivacea*, is resurrected for populations in the southern Kimberley, and *D. flagellatio* Wells & Wellington, 1985 is validated as a species restricted to northwest Queensland. Three new species are described.

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The whipsnakes (*Demansia*) of Australia and New Guinea are a distinctive group of medium to large, elongate, large-eyed, diurnal, fast-moving saurophagous snakes (Shine, 1980). They have proved to be one of the most taxonomically and nomenclaturally confusing genera of Australian elapids (Shea, 1998), even after the removal from *Demansia* of the brown snakes, referred to *Pseudonaja* by Worrell (1961a). By the end of the nineteenth century, ten names had been proposed, with four species recognized by Boulenger (1896). Subsequent work has shown that two of the species recognized by Boulenger were not only composite, but in some cases specimens of a single species were identified as two or more taxa (Shea, 1998). Loveridge (1934, 1949)

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and Kinghorn (1942) were unable to resolve species boundaries in *Demansia* and suggested that only a single species (*psammophis*) be recognized, although Loveridge (1949) suggested that a northern subspecies (*olivacea*) might be recognizable on the basis of greater numbers of subcaudal scales when larger samples became available. More recent work with larger series of specimens, together with field observations of sympatry between taxa, has partly resolved the taxonomy of the genus (Worrell, 1952, 1956, 1961a,b, 1963; Storr, 1978; Shea, 1998), with ten species or subspecies recognized by most modern authors (Storr *et al.*, 1986; Wilson & Knowles, 1988; Mirtschin & Davis, 1992; Ehmann, 1992; Cogger, 1996; Wilson & Swan, 2003).

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