

On *Boaedon fuliginosus* with designation of a neotype of *Lycodon fuliginosus* F. Boie, 1827, from Côte d'Ivoire (Serpentes: Lamprophiidae)

À propos de *Boaedon fuliginosus* avec la désignation d'un neotype de *Lycodon fuliginosus* F. Boie, 1827, provenant de la Côte d'Ivoire (Serpentes: Lamprophiidae)

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Abstract – Colubrid snakes of the genus *Boaedon* are among the most common snakes in Africa. To allow an unambiguous determination of specimens attributable to *Boaedon fuliginosus* (Boie, 1827), we designate and describe as neotype of *Lycodon fuliginosus* Boie, 1827, a specimen from Ivory Coast, West Africa, collected on 10 January 2014.

Keywords – Africa, Biogeography, Nomenclature, Snakes, Systematics.

Résumé – Les couleuvres du genre *Boaedon* sont des serpents parmi les plus communs en Afrique. Afin de permettre une détermination sans ambiguïté des spécimens attribuables à *Boaedon fuliginosus* (Boie, 1827), nous désignons et décrivons comme néotype de *Lycodon fuliginosus* Boie, 1827, un spécimen de Côte d'Ivoire, Afrique de l'Ouest collecté le 10 janvier 2014.

Mots-clés – Afrique, Biogéographie, Nomenclature, Serpents, Systématique.

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INTRODUCTION

As indicated in the Preamble of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICNZ, 1999, the Code hereafter), « The objects of the Code are to promote stability and universality in the scientific names of animals and to ensure that the name of each taxon is unique and distinct ». In a recent paper, Tiutenko & Bates (2026) challenged 130 years of use of the name *Boaedon fuliginosus* (Boie, 1827) for designating the plain blackish species of *Boaedon* distributed in West Africa and southern Morocco (Boulenger 1893, Trape 2023, Fig. 1). This challenge occurs in a context where a series of molecular studies performed in recent years clarified the status, cryptic diversity and geographic distribution of most populations previously attributed either to *Boaedon fuliginosus*, *Boaedon lineatus* (Duméril, Bibron & Duméril, 1854), or *Boaedon capensis* (Duméril, Bibron & Duméril, 1854), in various parts of Africa. These studies demonstrated that specimens from Central, Eastern and Southern Africa previously attributed to *B. fuliginosus* (despite not matching

the description of *Lycodon fuliginosus* Boie, 1827, since usually grey or brown and harbouring whitish or yellowish lines on the sides of the head) were genetically distinct from West and North African *B. fuliginosus* specimens, and belonged to various species newly described in the genus *Boaedon* (Trape & Mediannikov 2016, Hallermann et al. 2020, Trape et al. 2022, Hallermann & Hawlitschek 2025).

Tiutenko & Bates (2026), arguing that the type specimen of *B. fuliginosus* is lost, the type locality uncertain, and the description lacks detail to allow for an unambiguous determination of species identity, resurrected *Boaedon unicolor* (Duméril, Bibron & Duméril, 1854), and attributed to this species all West and North African specimens previously attributed to *B. fuliginosus*. Since the specimens studied by Duméril et al. (1854) were considered lost, they designated a neotype of *B. unicolor* from Ghana. In addition, Tiutenko & Bates (2026) considered that the name *Lycodon fuliginosus* F. Boie, 1827 was species inquirenda, and thus that the name



Figure 1 - General view of the IRD T.130 specimen of *Boaedon fuliginosus* (Boie, 1827) from Fazao in Togo collected on December 7, 2007, showing the typical colour pattern of this species. Photo: J.-F. Trape.

Figure 1 - Vue générale du spécimen IRD T.130 de *Boaedon fuliginosus* (Boie, 1827) de Fazao au Togo collecté le 7 décembre 2007 montrant le patron de coloration typique de cette espèce. Photo : J.-F. Trape.

Boaedon fuliginosus (Boulenger, 1893) was available. Among the five specimens attributed to *Boaedon fuliginosus* by Boulenger (1893), who referred them to *Lycodon fuliginosus* (F. Boie, 1827), one from West Africa, one from Morocco, one from Africa without locality, one without any locality and one from « Semmio, C. Africa » (presumed Zemio, Central African Republic), Tiutenko & Bates (2026) selected as lectotype of *Boaedon fuliginosus* (Boulenger, 1893), the Boulenger's specimen from the Central African Republic, a country where the previous mentions of this species are now attributed to *Boaedon perisvestris* Trape & Mediannikov, 2016, a species with the dorsum uniformly dark grey and a discrete whitish line on the sides of the head. Further studies, often including molecular analyses, have now shown that *B. perisilvestris* (type locality: Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo) has a vast range in wet savanna areas around the Congo forest block, including Adamawa in Nigeria, southern and central Cameroon, southern Chad, Central African Republic, South Sudan, Gaboon, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Trape & Mediannikov 2016, Trape *et al.* 2016, Greenbaum

et al. 2017, Nneji *et al.* 2019, Pauwels *et al.* 2019, Zassi-Boulou *et al.* 2020, Trape 2023).

METHODES & RESULTATS

The nomenclatural status of *Boaedon fuliginosus* (Boulenger, 1893) and the validity of its lectotype designation

To assess the validity of the lectotype designation by Tiutenko & Bates (2026), we must first determine the availability of the name *Boaedon fuliginosus* (Boulenger, 1893). This name is credited by Tiutenko & Bates (2026) to the first volume of the “Catalogue of the snakes of the British Museum (Natural History)” by G. A. Boulenger (1893), where it appears under the spelling *Boodon fuliginosus* (see Tiutenko & Bates 2026 for discussion on spelling issues). It is, however, obvious from this text that this name is not available, as it is clearly credited by Boulenger to Boie, 1827 (Fig. 2). Boulenger had no intention to create a new nomen, as can be seen from other names that he proposed as new in this book and where no previous sources are listed (e.g.,

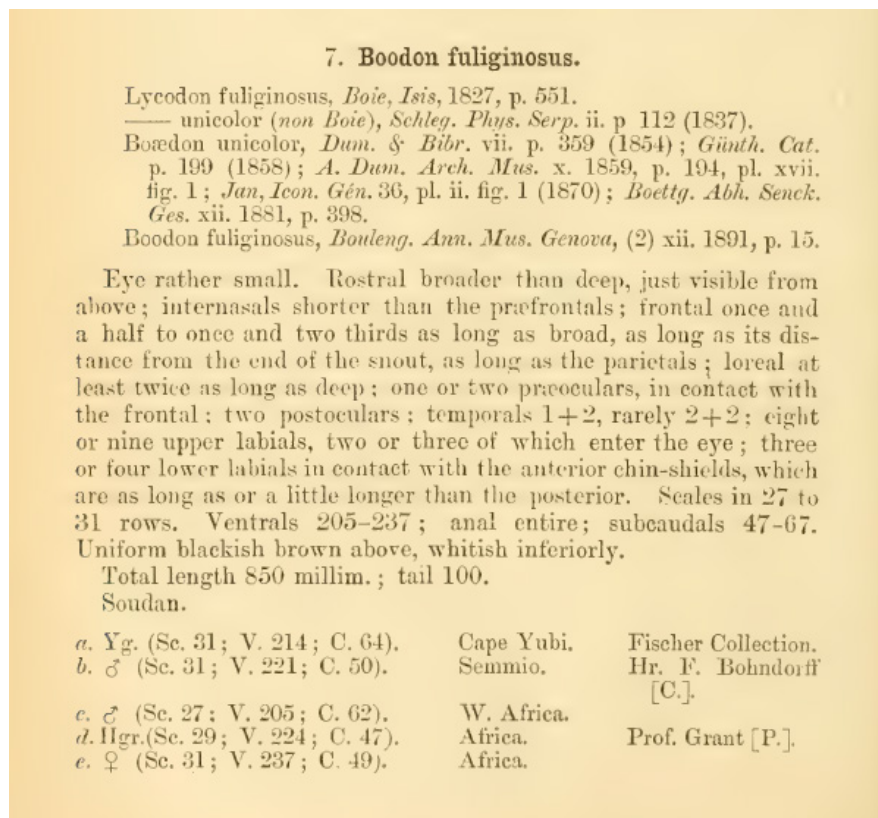


Figure 2 - Copy of the relevant part of Boulenger (1893) where *Boodon fuliginosus* is treated. Photo: P.-A. Crochet.

Figure 2 - Copie de la section du texte de Boulenger (1893) où il traite de *Boodon fuliginosus*. Photo : P.-A. Crochet.

Lycophidium jacksoni on page 340, now *Lycophidion jacksoni* (Boulenger, 1893)). We can thus safely conclude that *Boodon fuliginosus* (Boulenger, 1893) is a chresonym of *Lycodon fuliginosus* Boie, 1827.

The claim by Tiutenko & Bates (2026) that the designation of “*Lycodon fuliginosus* F. Boie, 1827” as “species inquirenda” makes *Boaedon fuliginosus* (Boulenger, 1893) available rests on no part of the Code whatsoever. No article of the Code allows for the conferment of availability to a previously unavailable species nomen because the allocation of the available nomen on which it is based in its original combination (its protonym sensu Dubois & Frétey 2023) is unclear, and the term “species inquirenda” does not appear anywhere in the Code. In conclusion, uncertainties in the allocation of the nomen *Lycodon fuliginosus* Boie, 1827 (that we acknowledge, see below) do not make *Boaedon fuliginosus* (Boulenger, 1893) available. It follows that the designation of a “lectotype” for this name is invalid. In addition, even if *Boaedon fuliginosus* (Boulenger, 1893) was to be treated as a valid name, none of the specimens examined by and listed in Boulenger (1893) are name-bearing types of *Lycodon fuliginosus* Boie, 1827; the action of

Tiutenko & Bates (2026), even if wrongly treated as valid, has no consequence on the name-bearing type of *Lycodon fuliginosus* Boie, 1827 and hence on the allocation and status of that name.

The allocation of the nomen *Lycodon fuliginosus* Boie, 1827 and the need for a neotype designation

We agree with Tiutenko & Bates (2026) that the allocation of the nomen *Lycodon fuliginosus* Boie, 1827 is currently unclear. As they explain thoroughly, the type has been consistently considered as lost by all authors who have written on the subject, the type locality is unclear (stated as “unknown” by Boie 1827) and the morphological data provided in Boie (1827) and unpublished sources related to this publication do not allow to unambiguously link this nomen to one and only one of the currently valid species in the genus *Boaedon*. The only way to clarify the type locality and hence stabilize the taxonomic status of *Lycodon fuliginosus* Boie, 1827 is thus through the designation of a neotype (see Art. 75.3.1 of the Code). Trape & Mediannikov (2016) and Trape (2023) provide characters differentiating *Boaedon fuliginosus* from the other African species

of the genus (see Art. 75.3.2). Tiutenko & Bates (2026) extensively describe the steps taken to locate the name-bearing specimen (see Art. 75.3.4). We thus designate below a neotype of *Lycodon fuliginosus* Boie, 1827.

Description of the neotype of *Lycodon fuliginosus* F. Boie, 1827

Neotype

A specimen housed in the collections of the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle of Paris, MNHN-RA 2025.36 (formerly IRD CI.212) from Drekro, Côte d'Ivoire (07°00'N, 05°17'W), collected on 10 January 2014 by J.-F. Trape (Fig. 3).

GenBank

KX249802 (16S gene, see phylogenetic tree in Trape *et al.* 2022).

Description

Snout-vent length (SVL) 375 mm, tail length 54 mm, total length 429 mm: ratio total length / SVL: 7.9. Sex female. Ventrals: 245 (Dowling: 242). Subcaudals 54, paired. Cloacal scale entire.

The head is rounded and distinct from the neck. The eye is medium-sized with a vertical pupil. The loreal is present. There is one preocular and two postoculars on each side of the head. There is no subocular. On each side of the head, there are eight supralabials, with the fourth and fifth entering the eye on each side of the head, and ten infralabials, the first to fourth in contact with anterior chin shields. The temporal formula is 1+3 on each side of the head. The dorsal scales are smooth and arranged in 29 straight rows at mid-body. The vertebral row is not distinct from the others. The back is uniformly blackish. The ventral surface is whitish. There is no light line on the side of the head.



Figure 3 - The neotype MNHN-RA 2025.36 of *Lycodon fuliginosus* Boie, 1827 (formerly IRD CI.212) from Drekro, Côte d'Ivoire: dorsal view, ventral view, head profile and subcaudals. Photos: J.-F. Trape

Figure 3 - Le neotype MNHN-RA 2025.36 de *Lycodon fuliginosus* Boie, 1827 (anciennement IRD CI.212) de Drekro, Côte d'Ivoire : vue dorsale, vue ventrale, profil de la tête et sous-caudales. Photos : J.-F. Trape

DISCUSSION

For more than 130 years - since Boulenger (1893) - the name *Boaedon fuliginosus* (Boie, 1827) has been regularly used for designating the uniformly dorsally blackish (« *Totus fuliginosus, subtus pallidior* » = All sooty, paler underneath) specimens of *Boaedon* distributed in West Africa and Morocco. By choosing a member of these populations as neotype of *Boaedon fuliginosus*, we thus selected a neotype which is consistent with what is known of the former name-bearing type, as numerous authors have interpreted the original description as pertaining to them (see Art. 75.3.5). The original type locality is unknown but has generally been linked to West Africa by previous authors because this is where the animals corresponding to the original description live (see Hallermann *et al.* 2020, even if this conclusion is challenged by Tiutenko & Bates 2026), thus satisfying Art. 75.3.6. Among other authors, this name was used for West African and Moroccan specimens by Sternfeld (1908), Chabanaud (1917), Angel (1932), Villiers (1950, 1975), Manaças (1955), Condamin (1958), Cansdale (1961), Doucet (1963), Menzies (1966), Hughes & Barry (1969), Hulselmans *et al.* (1970), Dunger (1971), Roman (1980), Håkansson (1981), Gruschwitz *et al.* (1991), Rödel *et al.* (1995), Bons & Geniez (1996), Joger & Lambert (1996), Schleich *et al.* (1996), Trape & Baldé (2014), Trape & Mané (2006, 2015, 2017), Padial (2006), Chirio (2009), Hughes (2012), Auliya *et al.* (2012), Sindaco *et al.* (2013), Trape & Mediannikov (2016), Geniez (2018, 2023), Martinez del Mármol *et al.* (2023) and Trape (2023). Until the last decade this name was also frequently used for designating *Boaedon* specimens from other parts of Africa, almost all of them not blackish but greyish or brown and with white or yellowish lines on the side of the head (e.g., Fitzsimons 1962, de Witte 1962, Roux-Estève & Guibé 1965, Thorpe & McCarthy 1978, Broadley 1983, Pitman 1974, Branch 1998, Largen & Spawls 2010), contrary to Boie (1827) description, but this use progressively ceased when molecular studies demonstrated that specimens from Central, Eastern and Southern Africa belonged to various other species, most of them newly described between 2016 and 2025 (Kelly *et al.* 2011, Greenbaum *et al.* 2015, Trape & Mediannikov 2016, Trape *et al.* 2016, Hallermann *et al.* 2020, Ceriaco *et al.* 2021, Trape *et al.* 2022, Hallermann & Hawlitschek 2025). For specimens from some of these areas, the name *B. fuliginosus* has remained temporarily used in recent years, but only waiting for further investigations and revisions of *Boaedon*

species (e.g., by Spawls *et al.* 2018 and Spawls *et al.* 2023, Spawls personal communication 2026) since the status of East African populations was only resolved in 2025 (Hallermann & Hawlitschek 2025). The recent designation by Tiutenko & Bates (2026) of a lectotype for *Boaedon fuliginosus* (Boulenger, 1893), is not only invalid but also creates chaos as it prevents the continued use of the name *fuliginosus* for West African and Moroccan specimens, as well as the currently accepted name *B. perisilvestris* for specimens from Central Africa. The designation here of a neotype from the Ivory Coast for *Boaedon fuliginosus* (Boie, 1827), genotyped for the 16S gene, resolves this problem.

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Date de soumission : samedi 30 mai 2026

Date d'acceptation : dimanche 5 juillet 2026

Date de publication : vendredi 28 août 2026

Editeur-en-Chef : Jérémie SOUCHET

Editeur associé : Aurélien MIRALLES

Relecteur : Przemysław ZDUNEK