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Two new subspecies of Mountain Dragon, *Rankinia boylani* Wells and Wellington, 1984 from New South Wales, Australia.

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ABSTRACT

Two geographically isolated populations within the *Rankinia boylani* Wells and Wellington, 1984 species group, from New South Wales are formally named as new subspecies.

One occurs near Orange on the western slopes of central New South Wales and the other in the near coastal ranges of the lower north coast of New South Wales, north of the Hunter Valley.

Keywords: Taxonomy; nomenclature; Lizards; Agamids; Mountain Dragons; Australia; New South Wales, ACT, *Rankinia*; *diemensis*; *hoserae*; *boylani*; *neildaviei*; *jameswhybrowi; fergussonae*; *martinekae*; new subspecies; *elonmuski*; *babeti*.

INTRODUCTION

The genus *Rankinia* was created by Wells and Wellington (1984), type species being *Grammatophora muricata diemensis* Gray, 1841.

Most recently the genus has been treated as monotypic by most publishing authors for the species *Grammatophora muricata diemensis* Gray, 1841, based on a specimen from Tasmania and now known as *Rankinia diemensis* (Gray, 1841).

Cogger (2014) treated *Rankinia diemensis* (Gray, 1841) better-known as the Mountain Dragon as being monotypic for the genus and occurring in a range from Tasmania, through Victoria and north to central eastern New South Wales.

These lizards are found in sandy areas, heaths and the like, often at high altitude. Their distribution appears to be patchy, probably due to habitat requirements as well as the influence of morphologically similar competing species within the genera *Amphibolurus* Wagler, 1830 and *Tympanocryptis* Peters, 1863, which share much of the same broad distribution.

Wells and Wellington (1984) formally named the population from the Sydney basin as *R. boylani*, reaffirmed by Wells and Wellington (1985).

However, the use of this name to identify the relevant taxon has not had general acceptance or use by publishing Australian herpetologists anywhere. This is in spite of clear and obvious morphological differences and a disjunct population from *R. diemensis*.

The basis of this non-acceptance of the validity of the taxon *R. boylani* has more to do with personality politics as practiced by a group known as the Wüster gang, who force their views on others using unethical and unlawful means as detailed by Hoser (2009, 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015a-f, 2019a, 2019b), ICZN (2013) and sources cited therein.

Hoser (2007) published an appeal to herpetologists to ignore the Wüster gang and to stop the general suppression of the Wells and Wellington works as it was hampering wildlife conservation.

This in turn led to the Wüster gang adding myself (Hoser) to the target list of herpetologists whose works they sought to use improper means to suppress and force others to do likewise (Kaiser 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2014a, 2014b and Kaiser *et al*. 2013).

The relevant response to the false claims and pseudoscience of the Wüster Gang (AKA Kaiser *et al*.) are dealt with in Hoser (2015a-f), Hoser (2019a-b), ICZN (2021), Hawkeswood (2021) and sources cited therein.

Ng *et al*. (2013) published a molecular phylogeny showing six well defined species within what had until then been treated as *R. diemensis*.

However, they chose not to recognize any bar *R. diemensis* (in line with Cogger *et al*. 1983) as for Ng *et al.* (2013) to do so, would have necessitated them recognizing the most divergent lineage being *R. boylani* and to do that was against the forced edicts of the Wüster gang.

There is little doubt that Ng *et al*. (2013) did not want to become a target of the illegal harassment by the Wüster gang, including false complaints made to law enforcement authorities to generate illegal raids on them and their families, telephone death threats at odd times of the day and night and other unlawful forms of attack.

Refusing to be bullied by the unlawful and unscientific demands of the Wüster gang, Hoser (2015g) formally described all identified lineages as full species, including four for the first time. These newly named species were *R. hoserae*, *R. neildaviei* and *R. jameswhybrowi* from Victoria and *R. fergussonae* from mid-western New South Wales. Hoser (2015g) restricted *R. diemensis* to Tasmania and nearby islands and recognized *R. boylani* as the form from the Sydney basin.

The populations previously treated as *R. diemensis* in the region between Sydney and the Victorian border were effectively ignored by Ng *et al*. (2013). Hoser (2015g) did similar, but had managed to ascertain that the specimens from the uplands along the coast south of Sydney in New South Wales were clearly affiliated with *R. boylani*, whereas those from the Australian Capital Territory and south through the Snowy Mountains were most closely affiliated with *R. hoserae* (in particular) and *R. jameswhybrowi.*

More recent inspection of further specimens from the Brindabella Ranges at the northern extremity of the range of animals that are morphologically similar to the Victorian species indicated that they were sufficiently different to warrant separate recognition as a unique taxonomic entity.

The same population is physically cut off from *Rankinia* to the north, south and east and is also reproductively isolated. Based on the geological history of the area and intervening areas of both unsuitable habitat and competing species, it was reasonable to infer that this isolation is ancient, meaning that the Brindabella Ranges population has evolved in isolation from the rest and will continue to do so.

Therefore Hoser (2019c) had no hesitation in recognizing it as a taxonomic entity in accordance with the rules as set out in the *International code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Ride *et al*. 1999).

In the absence of comparative DNA material from the relevant population, Hoser (2019c) chose to conservatively name that taxon as a subspecies of *R. hoserae.*

Should a detailed molecular analysis of this population be done at some stage in the future, there is a strong likelihood that the taxon formally named as *R. hoserae martinekae* Hoser, 2019 may have to be elevated to the status of full species.

Two other populations of *Rankinia* have attracted the interest of myself for some years.

These are the distinctive form common in the Mount Canobolas State Conservation Area near Orange in the western slopes of central New South Wales as well as the distinctive specimens known from elevated near coastal heaths north of the Hunter Valley in mid-north New South Wales.

It had been hoped to inspect further specimens in ensuing years but this has not transpired.

Rather than allowing either form to become extinct through general lack of interest, each are formally named herein as subspecies of *R. boylani* in accordance with the rules of the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* (Ride *et al.* 1999).

RANKINIA BOYLANI ELONMUSKI SUBSP. NOV.

LSIDurn:lsid:zoobank.org:act:A6675B89-DBF2-4CD1-AD5E-1A3369B85FBF

Holotype: A live specimen depicted in the image at: https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/9629052

collected from Canobolas, New South Wales, 2800, Australia that was photographed on Dec 27, 2017 at 9:54 AM AEDT and last checked as being online as accounted for herein on 20 April 2024.

Diagnosis: *Rankinia boylani elonmuski subsp. nov.* known only from the type locality, is similar in most respects to nominate *Rankinia boylani* as diagnosed below, but with the following obvious differences.
Both males and females lack the strongly contrasting dorsal patterns seen in *R. boylani*, although they are otherwise similar in colour pattern.
In female *R. boylani elonmuski subsp. nov.* the dorsal spines on either side of the mid dorsal line are large and closely spaced and not angled backwards, without smaller spines in between.
In the nominate form of *R. boylani* the spines are well spaced, separated by areas of somewhat raised skin, the spines being angled slightly backwards.

Rankinia boylani babeti subsp. nov., a taxon from the elevated heaths in the near coastal ranges north of the Hunter Valley, is similar in most respects to nominate *Rankinia boylani* as diagnosed below, but with the following obvious differences.

Spines on the back are relatively blunt edged, as opposed to pointed, while those on the flank are pointed. Nuchal crest spines are small and very pointed and more noticeable than in the nominate form of *R. boylani* and *R. boylani elonmuski subsp. nov.*.

Rankinia hoserae martinekae Hoser, 2019 is similar in most respects to nominate *R. hoserae* Hoser, 2015, which it would be identified as using the description of that taxon in Hoser (2015g).

Typical *R. hoserae hoserae* in life is depicted in Robertson and Coventry (2019) at page 215, top left and online at: https://www.flickr.com/photos/snakecatchers/53418085949/.

The two subspecies (*R. hoserae martinekae* and *R. hoserae hoserae*) are however separated by the following characters (in living adults): six light semi-circles on each side of the body with their bases running off the dorso-lateral lines in *R. hoserae martinekae* versus seven in *R. hoserae hoserae*; strong orangeish red on the upper lateral surfaces versus greyish in *R. hoserae hoserae*; dark patches on the upper surface of the anterior tail are ill-defined versus well defined in *R. hoserae hoserae.* Male *R. hoserae martinekae* have prominent spines on the lower flanks of the body, versus present but not prominent in *R. hoserae hoserae*, both taxa otherwise being relatively spinose members of *Rankinia* in terms of the upper body.
Within the genus *Rankinia*, each of the six morphologically similar species as identified by Hoser (2015g) are identified and separated from one another as follows:

Rankinia hoserae Hoser, 2015 is the taxon found around Anglesea on the central Victorian coast and the highlands of central Victoria in scattered locations including Kinglake National Park and Wombat State Forest. It is separated from the other five species in *Rankinia* Wells and Wellington, 1984 by the following characters: the hind legs have no obvious banding; exceptionally large spines on the upper body and in particular between the rear legs; some of the scale spines on the rear of the hind legs are either white or yellowish in colour; scales forming the nuchal crest are small, distinct and apart.

Rankinia jameswhybrowi Hoser, 2015 is the species found in the hills just east of Lake Eildon, Victoria and in the ranges to the north of there. It is separated from the other five species of *Rankinia* Wells and Wellington, 1984 by the following characters: the lighter dorso-linear blotches above the lateral flanks are of even curvature when viewed from above and noticeably elongate in shape and to an extent not seen in any of the other species; the tail is strongly banded, versus indistinctly banded in the other species; the nuchal crest is so poorly developed as to appear absent.

Rankinia diemensis (Gray, 1841), herein restricted to Tasmania and Bass Strait Islands, is separated from the other five species in *Rankinia* Wells and Wellington, 1984 by the following characters: the lateral spines running on each side from the base of the tail are smaller than the lateral spines along the sides of the body; the lighter dorso-linear blotches above the lateral flanks are of even curvature when viewed from above; there are distinct white-tipped spines on the posterior lateral edge of the back legs; the spines of the nuchal crest are distinctive in that they are easily noticed.

Rankinia boylani Wells and Wellington, 1984, herein restricted to NSW in the vicinity of the Sydney basin, including the Blue Mountains, to as far west as Mount Victoria (the type locality), but presumed to include most other specimens of *Rankinia* from New South Wales north of Goulburn, is separated from the other five species in *Rankinia* Wells and Wellington, 1984 by the following characters: the lateral spines running on each side from the base of the tail are considerably larger than the lateral spines along the sides of the body; the lighter dorso-linear blotches above the lateral flanks are not of even curvature when viewed from above,

these being larger at the posterior edge; there are no distinct white-tipped spines on the posterior lateral edge of the back legs; the spines of the nuchal crest are not distinctive in that they are easily not noticed.

Rankinia neildaviei Hoser, 2015 herein confined to the Grampians in south-western Victoria, is separated from the other five species in *Rankinia* Wells and Wellington, 1984 by the following characters: the dorsal spines on the anterior part of the tail are large; there are no distinct white-tipped spines on the posterior lateral edge of the back legs; the lighter dorso-linear blotches above the lateral flanks are all or mostly of even curvature when viewed from above; the banding on the hind limbs is distinct (as opposed to obvious banding that is indistinct in some other species in the genus, including *R. diemensis* and *R. boylani*).

Rankinia fergussonae Hoser, 2015 from Goonoo National Park, NSW is defined and separated from the other five species in the genus *Rankinia* Wells and Wellington, 1984 by the following: It is similar in most respects to *R. boylani,* from which it is differentiated by its more prominent nuchal crest scales (prominent versus very hard to see) and the presence of a well-developed white line along the lower lateral flank of the body on either side, which is indistinct in *R. boylani* and usually not white in colour, but light greyish instead or if whitish in *R. boylani*, is invariably broken.

The genus *Rankinia* Wells and Wellington, 1984, is separated from all other Australian agamids by the following suite of characters:

Body is without very large conical spines or a spiny nuchal hump; no large skin frill around the neck; tail is not compressed and with a lateral keel, it does not have a strongly differentiated dorsal keel; a vertebral series of enlarged scales present or absent on the back; if present, three or more femoral pores present on each side; femoral pores present; a single row of spinose scales on sides of the base of the tail; lower edge of supralabials straight or at most slightly curved, forming a more or less straight or even edge to the upper lip; no row of enlarged scales from below eye to above ear; dorsal scales of body heterogeneous, but with either distinctive vertebral and paravertebral rows of enlarged, keeled or spinose scales and with a poorly developed nuchal crest (that varies in development between species), no dorsal crest and sometimes a distinct vertebral ridge; tympanum distinct; enlarged spinose scales along each side of the base of the tail.

Distribution: Currently *R. boylani elonmuski subsp. nov.* is known only from the Mount Canobolas State Conservation Area near Orange in New South Wales, Australia.

The fact that this taxon is known only from a single site makes this a potentially vulnerable taxon. One hopes that the dysfunctional government-owned enterprise Taronga Zoo does not monopolize this taxon and "manage" it to extinction in the same way Australian government-owned zoos have done for other threatened species such as the Tasmanian Tiger *Thylacinus cynocephalus* (Harris, 1808).

Etymology: Named in honour of Elon Musk, multi billionaire owner of X (formerly twitter) for his courageous stand in calling out the fascism of the Australian government in 2024, when they tried to censor the internet globally and allow only their own narrative to be peddled online in the wake of a police protected thug attacking a priest in Sydney's west and the video footage of the assault being posted on various "social media" platforms.

RANKINIA BOYLANI BABETI SUBSP. NOV.

LSIDurn:lsid:zoobank.org:act:4E02156E-606C-4FFF-A741-6B1EB8892EF6

Holotype: A preserved specimen at the Australian Museum in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, specimen number R.107179 collected from the Camping Area at the north end of the Werrikimbe National Park, north-east of Yarrowitch, New South Wales, Australia, Latitude -31.15 S., Longitude 152.233 E.

This government-owned facility allows access to its holdings.

Paratype: A preserved specimen at the Australian Museum in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, specimen number R.141495 collected from Bull Gully, near the junction of Bull Gully and Bull Ridge Roads in the Stewarts Brook State Forest, New South Wales, Australia, Latitude -31.95666 S., Longitude 151.37693 E.

Diagnosis: *Rankinia boylani babeti subsp. nov.*, a taxon from the elevated heaths in the near coastal ranges north of the Hunter Valley, is similar in most respects to nominate *Rankinia boylani* as diagnosed below, but with the following obvious differences.

Spines on the back are relatively blunt edged, as opposed to pointed, while those on the flank are pointed. Nuchal crest spines are small and very pointed and more noticeable than in the nominate form of *R. boylani* and *R. boylani elonmuski subsp. nov.*.

Rankinia boylani elonmuski subsp. nov. known only from the type locality, is similar in most respects to nominate *Rankinia boylani* as diagnosed below, but with the following obvious differences. Both males and females lack the strongly contrasting dorsal patterns seen in *R. boylani*, although they are otherwise similar in colour pattern.
In female *R. boylani elonmuski subsp. nov.* the dorsal spines on either side of the mid dorsal line are large and closely spaced and not angled backwards, without smaller spines in between. In the nominate form of *R. boylani* the spines are well spaced, separated by areas of somewhat raised skin, the spines being angled slightly backwards.

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Typical *R. hoserae hoserae* in life is depicted in Robertson and Coventry (2019) at page 215, top left and online at: https://www.flickr.com/photos/snakecatchers/53418085949/.

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Rankinia boylani Wells and Wellington, 1984, herein restricted to NSW in the vicinity of the Sydney basin, including the Blue Mountains, as far west at Mount Victoria (the type locality), but presumed to include most other specimens of *Rankinia* from New South Wales north of Goulburn, is separated from the other five species in *Rankinia* Wells and Wellington, 1984 by the following characters: the lateral spines running on each side from the base of the tail are considerably larger than the lateral spines along the sides of the body; the lighter dorso-linear blotches above the lateral flanks are not of even curvature when viewed from above, these being larger at the posterior edge; there are no distinct white-tipped spines on the posterior lateral edge of the back legs; the spines of the nuchal crest are not distinctive in that they are easily not noticed.

Rankinia neildaviei Hoser, 2015 herein confined to the Grampians in south-western Victoria, is separated from the other five species in *Rankinia* Wells and Wellington, 1984 by the following characters: the dorsal spines on the anterior part of the tail are large; there are no distinct white-tipped spines on the posterior lateral edge of the back legs; the lighter dorso-linear blotches above the lateral flanks are all or mostly of even curvature when viewed from above; the banding on the hind limbs is distinct (as opposed to obvious banding that is indistinct in some other species in the genus, including *R. diemensis* and *R. boylani*).

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Distribution: Currently *R. boylani babeti subsp. nov.* is known only from the heaths in the near coastal high country north of the Hunter Valley in New South Wales north to an area between Kempsey and Armidale.

The locations this taxon occurs in are limited in area making this a potentially vulnerable taxon.

Etymology: Named in honour of Australian Senator, Ralph Emmanuel Didier "Deej" Babet, a Palmer United Party Senator who bravely went against the corrupt fascist Australian government narrative and spoke out publicly in favour of Elon Musk, multi billionaire owner of "X" (formerly twitter) supporting his courageous stand in calling out the fascism of the Australian government in 2024. That was when they tried to censor the internet globally and allow only their own narrative to be peddled online in the wake of a police protected thug attacking a priest in Sydney's west and the video footage of the assault being posted on various "social media" platforms.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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