



INTRODUCED SPECIES

First Record of the Brahminy Blindsnake, *Indotyphlops braminus* (Squamata: Typhlopidae), in Cuba

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Photographs by the senior author.

The Brahminy Blindsnake (*Indotyphlops braminus*)¹, is unisexual and reproduces by parthenogenesis. This breeding strategy and its capacity to survive in pots and small containers used for plant cultivation and sometimes international transportation are characteristics of a very successful

¹ The Brahminy Blindsnake also is known as the “Flowerpot Blindsnake” for its propensity to be transported in the root systems of potted plants, a frequent means of introduction to areas where the species is not native. *Indotyphlops braminus* was formerly included in the genus *Ramphotyphlops* until the recent revision of the Typhlopidae by Hedges et al. (2014). The genus as currently defined comprises 22 species, most of them distributed in southern Asia, especially India and Sri Lanka.



Fig. 1. Brahminy Blindsnake (*Indotyphlops braminus*; MNHNCu 5071), from Lawton, Havana City, Cuba with details of the head in dorsal and lateral views. The dark dorsal and ventral surfaces readily distinguish this foreign species from native typhlopids.

colonizer (McKeown 1996, Bomford et al. 2009, Powell et al. 2011). The species is the most widely distributed snake on Earth. From its presumed original distribution in south-eastern Asia (Storr 1981, Wallach 2008), it has invaded tropical and subtropical regions throughout the world and is now known from Africa, Australia, Japan, the United States (including the Hawaiian Islands), Central America, and the Lesser Antilles (Wallach 2008, Kraus 2009). In the Caribbean islands, these snakes have been reported from Anguilla, Aruba, St. Christopher, Barbados, Guadeloupe, Mustique, the Turks & Caicos, Curaçao, and St. Eustatius (Powell et al. 2011). West Indian populations might have been introduced from Florida (Powell et al. 2011), but Sanchez and López-Forment (1988) suggested that at least some Mexican populations can be traced to the Philippines.

Here we report on five individuals of *Indotyphlops braminus* recorded in two localities in the City of Havana. Four of them were deposited in the herpetological collection of Museo Nacional de Historia Natural de Cuba (MNHNCu 5071–4). Three specimens (MNHNCu 5071–3; Fig. 1) were collected by the senior author in Loma del Burro, Lawton, Municipality of 10 de Octubre, Havana City (23°06'00"N; 82°21'24"W; 38m above sea level) on 23 and 30 July 2014. Another specimen (MNHNCu 5074) was found by the junior author in Playa, Havana City (23°06'25"N; 82°25'18"W) on 26 July 2014. The two localities are about 7 km apart, suggesting that this species is broadly established and might still be spreading. Adult specimens had total lengths of 125 mm (MNHNCu 5072), 139 mm (MNHNCu 5071), and 144 mm (MNHNCu 5174). One juvenile (MNHNCu 5073) had a total length of 67 mm. Robert Powell confirmed the identity of the specimens from photographs.

The snakes were found active at night (2000–2030 h) on rainy days as they crossed paved walking trails or were collected directly on the surface of the ground. In addition, a crushed and desiccated individual was seen but not collected on 22 August 2014 on a street close to a public park only a few meters from the first locality.

The species most likely was introduced in Cuba as a consequence of importing ornamental plants, as has been suggested for other Caribbean islands (Powell et al. 2011). Although the origin(s) of Cuban populations remain(s) obscure, national garden and agricultural suppliers might be contributing to the apparently rapid increase in distribution within the country.

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