

About Systematic Position and Distribution of Caucasian Rock Lizard *Darevskia caucasica vedenica* (Darevsky et Roitberg, 1999)

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Abstract: *Darevskia caucasica vedenica* is one of the most poorly studied taxa of the genus *Darevskia*. Validity of this taxon is questionable: some authors place it in the synonymy of *Lacerta caucasica caucasica* Mehely, 1909 (Kuzmin, Semenov, 2006). Our field researches and examination of collections material (including typical series ZISP №17744. 1–41) confirm validity of the *D. c. vedenica*.

The known area of the taxon covers about 400 km² of bukovo-grabovyyh woods, after the woods and, partially, subalpine meadows in the Basins of Hulhulau and, possibly, Bass Rivers (elevation 800-1800 m a.s.l., NW from the Andijsky Ridge, Chechen Republic). *D. c. vedenica* is one of the most numerous reptiles of the mentioned territory. In the August 1988, we have met 65 lizards on a route of 6 km on the right bank the River Oholitlau. However, the local density can be much higher. New record of *D. c. vedenica* comes from the upper courses of Fortanga River, 5-7 km E from Verhnyy Alkun (Ingushetia), mountain-woody country at heights of 700-1000 m a.s.l. Here it possibly lives with *Darevskia p. praticola* and *Darevskia c. caucasica*. Special character of pholidosis of the given population is a high frequency of reduction of first loreal shield. At 25 % of individuals it is absent completely, at 25 % – on the one hand (n=12).

Contours of prospective modern area of *D. c. vedenica* coincide with borders of the most humid (more than 800 mm per year) and cool (average annual isotherms + 4 – 6 °C) zones in a range of altitudes of 700 – 2000 m. a.s.l. It could be supposed that first stages of isolation and formation of *D. c. vedenica* are connected with the Pleistocene glaciations of the Caucasus. The subsequent formation took place in the mesohyl refugia on the territory of the modern Chechen Republic and Ingushetia in connection with periods of strong aridization of climate on northeast macroslope of the Big Caucasus (Holocene).

As potentially vulnerable, endemic subspecies, *D. c. vedenica* was placed in 3rd category of the Red Book of the Chechen Republic (2007).

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