



First population assessment of two cryptic Tiger Geckos (*Goniurosaurus*) from northern Vietnam: Implications for conservation

¹Hai Ngoc Ngo, ^{2,3}Thomas Ziegler, ⁴Truong Quang Nguyen, ⁴Cuong The Pham, ¹Tao Thien Nguyen, ^{5,6,7}Minh Duc Le, and ^{2,3,*}Mona van Schingen

¹Vietnam National Museum of Nature, Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology, 18 Hoang Quoc Viet Road, Hanoi, VIETNAM ²Cologne Zoo, Riehler Straße 173, 50735, Cologne, GERMANY ³Department of Terrestrial Ecology, Institute of Zoology, University of Cologne, Zùlpicher Straße 47b, 50674, Köln, GERMANY ⁴Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources, Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology, 18 Hoang Quoc Viet Road, Hanoi, VIETNAM ⁵Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Hanoi University of Science, Vietnam National University, 334 Nguyen Trai Road, Hanoi, VIETNAM ⁶Centre for Natural Resources and Environmental Studies, Hanoi National University, 19 Le Thanh Tong, Hanoi, VIETNAM ⁷Department of Herpetology, American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, New York, New York 10024, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Abstract.—The Cat Ba Tiger Gecko *Goniurosaurus catbaensis* Ziegler, Nguyen, Schmitz, Stenke and Rösler, 2008 is a recently discovered species endemic to Cat Ba Island, Hai Phong, Vietnam. Morphologically, *G. catbaensis* resembles *G. luyi* Grismer, Brian, Viets and Boyle, 1999, which was originally described in 1999 from southern China and was recorded in 2006 also in northeastern Vietnam. Both species inhabit remote limestone habitats, which suffer ongoing degradation and fragmentation due to agricultural development and the expansion of touristic sites. Tiger Geckos experience increasing interest in the international pet trade, which already resulted in local population extirpation of *G. luyi* due to unsustainable overexploitation for commercial use. However, impacts of anthropogenic pressures on wild populations, distribution ranges, and population sizes of *Goniurosaurus* species remain imperfectly studied. Herein we used a capture-recapture method to provide preliminary population size estimation of the endemic island dwelling species, *G. catbaensis*, in comparison to its cryptic continental relative, *G. luyi*, in order to evaluate their conservation status and assess the level of threats. Our study revealed relatively small population sizes and provided evidence for the negative impact of humans on the two *Goniurosaurus* species. Our research emphasizes the necessity to support the conservation of the species and their natural habitats, especially on the Cat Ba Archipelago. We further provide a new provincial record of *G. luyi* in Vietnam from Lang Son Province and record for the first time evidence for the occurrence of *G. catbaensis* on further offshore island in the Ha Long Archipelago.

Key words. Eublepharidae, distribution, population size, new record, endemism, conservation measures

Citation: Ngo HN, Ziegler T, Nguyen TQ, Pham CT, Nguyen TT, Le MD, van Schingen M. 2016. First population assessment of two cryptic Tiger Geckos (*Goniurosaurus*) from northern Vietnam: Implications for conservation. *Amphibian & Reptile Conservation* 10(1) [General Section]: 34–45 (e120).

Copyright: © 2016 Ngo et al. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License, which permits unrestricted use for non-commercial and education purposes only, in any medium, provided the original author and the official and authorized publication sources are recognized and properly credited. The official and authorized publication credit sources, which will be duly enforced, are as follows: official journal title *Amphibian & Reptile Conservation*; official journal website <amphibian-reptile-conservation.org>.

Received: 12 January 2016; **Accepted:** 16 June 2016; **Published:** 15 July 2016

Introduction

Tiger Geckos of the genus *Goniurosaurus* have a restricted distribution range in Asia, from northern Vietnam over southern China eastwards to the Ruykuyu Archipelago of Japan. Currently, 17 species are recognized; most of them are endemic to small areas (Grismer et al. 1994,

1999; Seufer et al. 2005; Yang and Chan 2015; Ziegler et al. 2008). Tiger Geckos are popular in the international pet trade and the species *G. luyi* was reported being extirpated at its type locality in southern China shortly after its description (Stuart et al. 2006). Although Tiger Geckos are considered to be threatened by extinction due to overexploitation for the illegal trade and habitat de-

Correspondence. Email: [*mschinge@smail.uni-koeln.de](mailto:mschinge@smail.uni-koeln.de) (corresponding author).

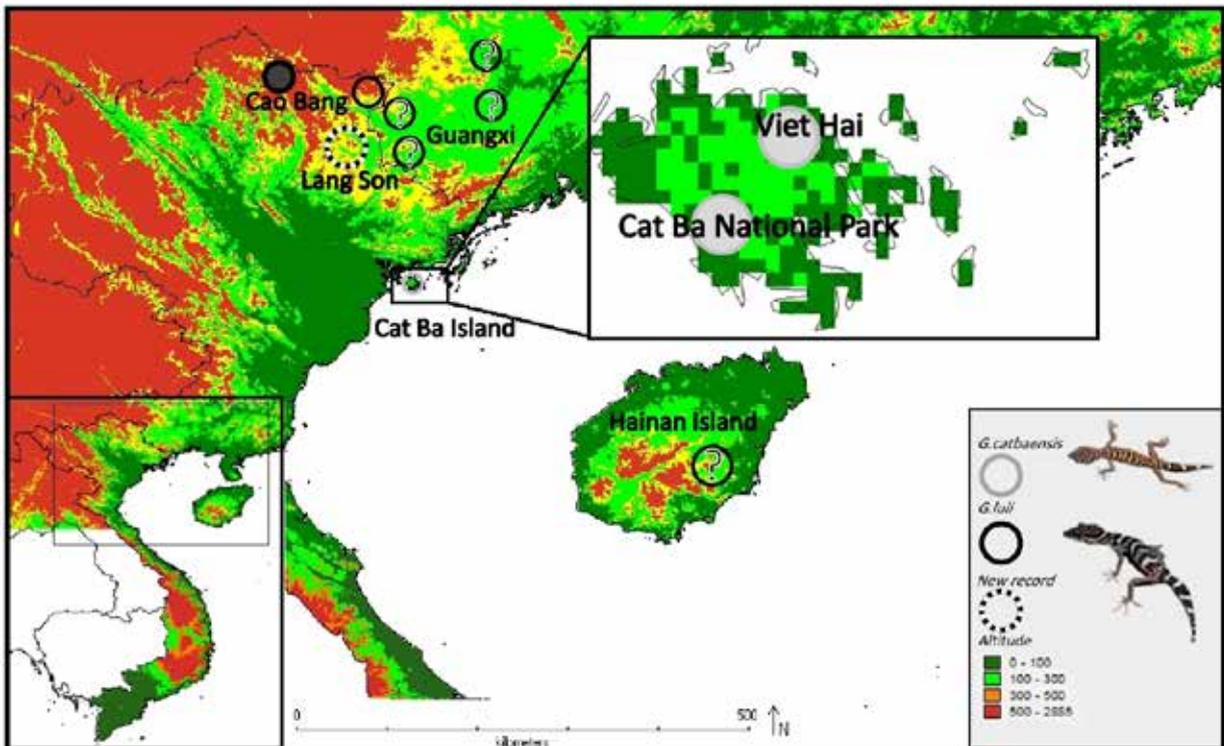


Fig. 1. Distribution of the cryptic species *Goniurosaurus catbaensis* (gray circles) and *G. luyi* (black circles): Filled circles represent study areas; dashed circle represents new record of *G. luyi*; question marks indicate former localities or sites where the current presence is unclear. Occurrence records were represented as big circles to prevent showing exact locality data.

struction, only the members of the *G. kuroiwa* group are listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (Ota 2010). Knowledge about the status of the remaining *Goniurosaurus* populations is poor and for most species are not yet available. This study aims to contribute towards a better understanding about the population status of the two species, *Goniurosaurus catbaensis* and *G. luyi* in Vietnam. Both species are members of the *G. luyi* species group, which contains eight known species, *G. araneus* Grismer, Viets and Boyle 1999 from the northern portion of Vietnam, *G. banglingensis* Grismer, Haitao, Orlov, and Anajeva 2002 from Hainan Island, China, *G. luyi* Grismer, Viets and Boyle 1999 from northern Vietnam and southeastern mainland of China, *G. catbaensis* Ziegler, Nguyen, Schmitz, Stenke, and Rösler 2008 from Cat Ba Island of Vietnam, *G. huiliensis* Orlov, Ryabov, Nguyen, Nguyen, and Ho 2008 from northern Vietnam, *G. liboensis* Wang, Yang, and Grismer 2013 from the border region between Guangxi and Guizhou provinces, *G. kadoorieorum* Yang and Chan 2015, and *G. kwangsiensis* Yang and Chan 2015 from Guangxi Province, China. The members of this species group are morphologically very similar and their phylogenetic relationships are only partly resolved (Grismer et al. 1994, 1999; Seufer et al. 2005; Vu et al. 2006; Yang and Chan 2015; Ziegler et al. 2008). Hence, we investigated one of the most poorly known species, *G. catbaensis*, which is an endemic flagship species for Cat Ba Island in the Gulf of Tonkin, northern Vietnam. This island belongs to one of the most attractive tourist sites in Vietnam, but the impact of the

tourism on this ecosystem and its biodiversity is not yet fully understood.

Population size estimations provide essential information for the classification of the threat level of a species and are crucial for wildlife management and management of the long-term survival of populations and species (Reed et al. 2003; Traill et al. 2007). We therefore conducted the first population assessment of *G. catbaensis*, including population density, size, and structure, and evaluation of human impacts on the population. In comparison, we likewise studied its cryptic sibling species *G. luyi* on the mainland of northern Vietnam, which is also karst adapted, and occupies a similar ecological niche (Grismer 1999; Ziegler et al. 2008). *Goniurosaurus luyi* indeed shows a wider distribution range, but its natural history is still poorly known and data on its abundance in Vietnam is completely lacking to date (Grismer 1999; Yang and Chan 2015). By comparing populations of two closely related species, one from an island with the other in mainland ecosystems, we expected lower population densities in the mainland, stronger human impacts at tourist sites, and finally aimed to gain insights for improved conservation strategies for the Tiger Geckos in the future.

Materials and Methods

Study areas: Study sites were selected based on previous surveys of the authors' on Cat Ba Island, Hai Phong City and in Ha Lang District, Cao Bang Province, north-

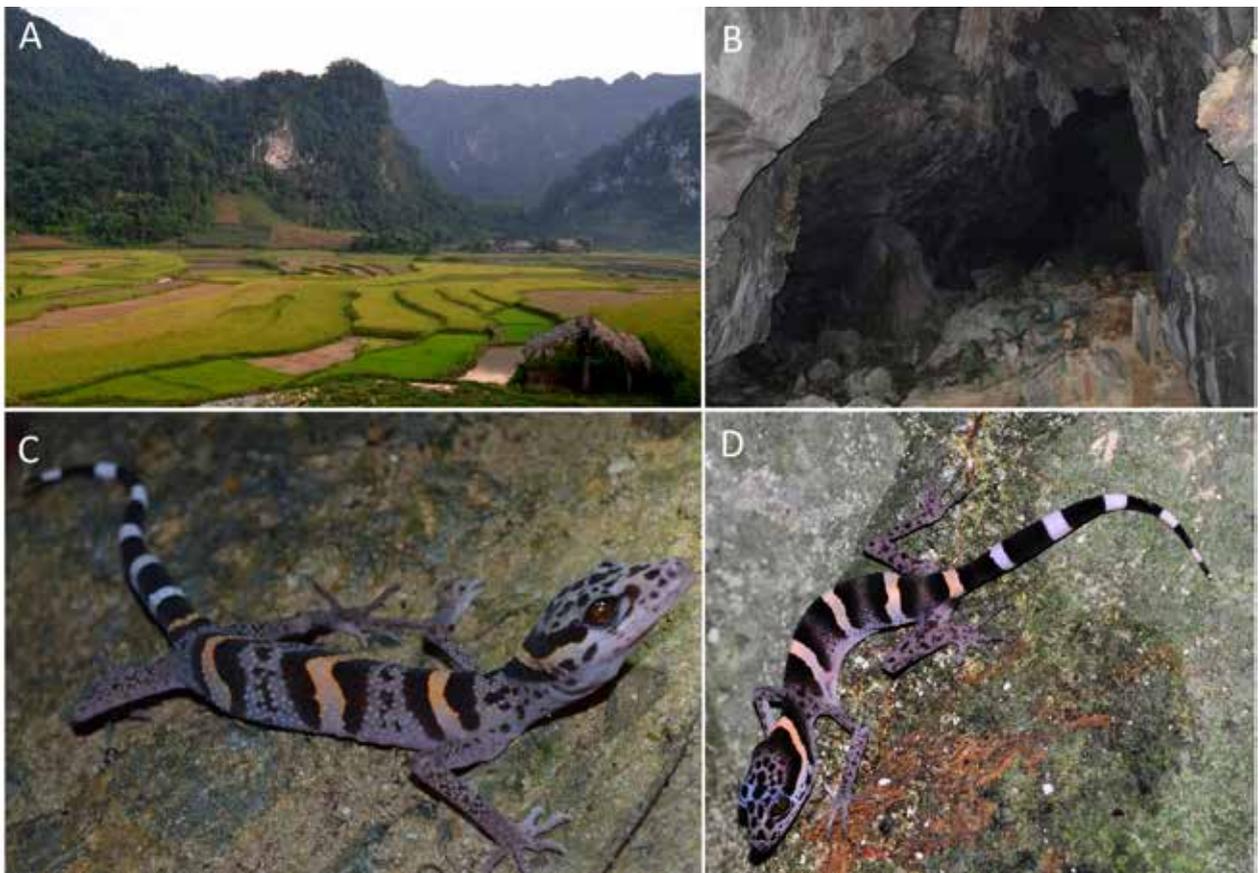


Fig. 2. **A:** Macrohabitat and **B:** Microhabitat of *Goniurosaurus luei* in Ha Lang District, Cao Bang Province, North Vietnam; specimens of *G. luei* from **C:** Cao Bang Province and **D:** Lang Son Province (new record). Photos *Mona van Schingen, Marta Bernardes, and Tao Thien Nguyen.*

ern Vietnam (e.g., Lehmann, 2013; Ziegler et al. 2008, see Fig. 1). Both areas comprise large limestone karst formations with secondary evergreen forest and share zoogeographic affinities (Fig. 2A, 3A). The limestone karst forest provides diverse habitats for a unique flora and fauna, and is recognized as arcs of biodiversity (Clements et al. 2006). While habitats in Cao Bang Province—situated at the border to China—lie outside protected areas, Cat Ba Island was recognized as “Cat Ba Archipelago Biosphere Reserve” (CBBR) by the UNESCO in 2004, due to its significant ecosystem and biodiversity values (CBBR Authority 2013). Besides the recent discovery of *G. catbaensis* by Ziegler et al. (2008), Cat Ba Island harbors 282 further species of terrestrial vertebrates, of which 22 are listed in the Red Data Book of Vietnam. Cat Ba is renowned for the endemic, Critically Endangered Golden-headed Langur (*Trachypithecus poliocephalus*). Cat Ba Archipelago as well as the adjacent Ha Long World Heritage Area account as the most popular tourist destination in Vietnam, annually attracting more than one million tourists (CBBR Authority 2013), and thus is facing several challenges from rapid tourism as well as aquaculture development, and climate change. During the present study, two sites on Cat Ba Island, which distinctly differed in the number of tourists, were selected in

order to evaluate if the presence of tourists might impact wild populations of *Goniurosaurus* (Fig. 1).

Field surveys: During a field survey in 2012 several *Goniurosaurus* cf. *luei* specimens were observed in Lang Son Province. One voucher specimen was collected and deposited in the collection of the Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources (IEBR), Hanoi (TD-LS2012.1). The specimen was determined by comparison with further specimens of *G. luei* from Cao Bang Province (ML-19, TAO-182, IEBR 3252, CB-2012.2, IEBR 3254, and IEBR 3253) and based on data from the literature (Grismer et al. 1999; Yang and Chan 2015). Exact locality data is not presented herein to prevent poaching (see also Yan and Chan 2015). For assessment of the population status of *G. catbaensis* and *G. luei*, field surveys were conducted between June and August 2014, May 2015 and during a short time in June 2015, which is the non-hibernation season of *Goniurosaurus* (Grismer et al. 1999). Seven transects (1,100 to 4,200 m in length) along limestone cliffs or caves were repeatedly surveyed in periods of several days on Cat Ba Island and in Cao Bang Province. Surveys took place after sunset between 7:30 and 11:30 pm, when lizards were found active or foraging. Captured animals were individually marked with a



Fig. 3. **A:** Macrohabitat of *Goniurosaurus catbaensis* at the coast of Cat Ba Island; **B:** Limestone cliffs, the typical microhabitat of *G. catbaensis*; **C:** Adult male of *G. catbaensis* marked for population assessment; **D:** First evidence for the occurrence of *G. catbaensis* within limestone cave of small offshore Island in Ha Long Bay archipelago. Photos Hai Ngo, Tao Thien Nguyen, and Minh Le Pham.

permanent pen (Edding Eraser) and released on the same spot after taking measurements (see Fig. 3C). This marking technique has the advantage of being non invasive, inexpensive, and enables the short-term identification of animals, while markings last until the next shedding of the animals.

Population analysis: To estimate population sizes, we applied a “Capture-recapture Method” after Huang et al. (2008) by using an “Invisibility Rate Index,” which compensates for animals present but not detected during surveys. The method is described in more details in Huang et al. (2008) and van Schingen et al. (2014). Estimated population sizes were only applied for the specific surveyed sites, and did not encompass the entire populations of the species. Since it is impossible to survey all suitable habitats, density estimations in reference to the transect line were used as relative abundances of respective species. To assess the population structure, lizards were categorized into three age classes based on snout-vent length (SVL > 105 mm = adult, SVL > 85 mm = subadult, and SVL < 85 mm = juvenile), sexes, and in case of females, into gravid and non-gravid specimens. To test for differences in population structure between the island species *G. catbaensis* and the continental *G. luyi*, a Chi² test with $\alpha = 0.05$ was applied with GraphPad

Prism version 5.0 for Windows, GraphPad Software, La Jolla California USA, www.graphpad.com. We further compared densities of *Goniurosaurus* in areas, which are frequently visited by tourists with areas where access is limited in order to evaluate if tourism affects wild populations.

Molecular analysis: In order to confirm the taxonomic assignment of the newly collected specimens of *Goniurosaurus* cf. *luyi* from Lang Son and Cao Bang, a fragment of the mitochondrial ribosomal gene, 16S, was amplified using the primer pair 16Sar and 16Sbr (Palumbi et al. 1991) for four samples (TD-LS2012.1, TAO-182, ML-19, IEBR-3254). Tissue samples were extracted using DNeasy blood and tissue kit, Qiagen (California, USA). Extracted DNA from the fresh tissue was amplified by PCR mastermix (Fermentas, Canada). The PCR volume consisted of 21 μ l (10 μ l of mastermix, five μ l of water, two μ l of each primer at 10 pmol/ μ l, and two μ l of DNA or higher depending on the quantity of DNA in the final extraction solution). PCR condition was: 95 °C for five minutes to activate the taq; with 40 cycles at 95 °C for 30 s, 50 °C for 45 s, 72 °C for 60 s; and the final extension at 72 °C for six minutes.

PCR products were subjected to electrophoresis through a 1% agarose gel (UltraPure™, Invitrogen). Gels

First population assessment of two cryptic Tiger Geckos

Table 1. Totally observed specimens, densities and estimated population size of *Goniurosaurus catbaensis* and *G. luii* in 2014 and 2015.

		2014		2015
		June	July	August
				May
Total Cat Ba Island				
Species	<i>G. catbaensis</i>			
Total observed	—	17	12	14
D[ind/km of transect]	—	1.3	1.0	1.3
Population size	—	24	16	16
Cat Ba National Park				
Species	<i>G. catbaensis</i>			
Total observed	—	5	6	3
D[ind/km of transect]	—	0.9	1.1	0.9
Population size	—	5	8	3
Viet Hai Commune				
Species	<i>G. catbaensis</i>			
Total observed	—	12	6	11
D[ind/km of transect]	—	1.7	0.8	1.5
Population size	—	19	8	13
Ha Lang District, Cao Bang Province				
Species	<i>G. luii</i>			
Total observed	15	—	—	—
D[ind/km of transect]	0.8	—	—	—
Population size	21	—	—	—

were stained for 10 minutes in 1X TBE buffer at two pg/ml of ethidium-bromide, and visualized under UV light. Successful amplifications were purified to eliminate PCR components using GeneJET™ PCR Purification Kit (Fermentas, Canada). Purified PCR products were sent to Macrogen Inc. (Seoul, South Korea) for sequencing.

Sequences generated in this study were aligned with one another using De Novo Assemble function in the program Geneious v.7.1.8 (Kearse et al. 2012). They were then compared with other sequences using the Basic Local Alignment Search Tool (BLAST) in GenBank.

Results

New population record of *G. luii*: Four sequences of 574 bps were obtained from the *Goniurosaurus* specimen collected in Lang Son Province. The sequences are almost identical to each other, except in two positions, and 99% to 100% similar to those of *Goniurosaurus luii* from GenBank, specifically the sequences with accession numbers EU499390, EU499391, KC765083, KM455054. The results confirmed that *Goniurosaurus* samples collected in Lang Son Province and in Cao Bang Province are conspecific with *G. luii*. Thus, our finding represents the first record of *G. luii* and the second recorded *Goniurosaurus* species from Lang Son Province, northern Vietnam. Previously, only *G. huuliensis* was known from Huu Lien Nature Reserve, Huu Lung district

in the South of Lang Son Province occurring at elevations of about 370 m (Orlov et al. 2008). *Goniurosaurus luii* was recorded from the north at similar elevations of about 364 m above sea level. Based on our current knowledge no sympatric occurrence of the two species has been recorded so far, but exact distribution boundaries remain unknown. The microhabitats of *G. luii* in Lang Son Province were densely vegetated limestone caves, which are similar to those observed in Cao Bang Province (Fig. 2B). The Geckos had been found active during night on cliffs or cave walls about 0.5–2.5 m above the ground. Most interestingly, our morphological examination of the newly recorded *G. luii* specimens from Lang Son Province showed that no significant differences in diagnostic characters compared with the recently described *G. kadoorieorum* (see Table 1, Fig. 3D). But the newly recorded specimens of *G. luii* from Lang Son Province slightly differed from both *G. luii* and *G. kadoorieorum* in having more nasal scales surrounding the naris (9 vs. 6–7 in *G. kadoorieorum* and 6–8 in *G. luii*) and more cilia (59–60 vs. 47–54 in *G. kadoorieorum* and 50–56 in *G. luii*) (see Yang and Chan 2015).

Extended distribution range of *G. catbaensis*: In this study *G. catbaensis* was recorded—besides already known sites in Cat Ba National Park (NP) and Viet Hai commune—on karst formations at the coastline of Cat Ba Island (Fig. 3B). An adult female was found on rocks

Table 2. Morphological characters of *Goniurosaurus luyi* from Guangxi (type series; Grismer et al. 1999), Lang Son and Cao Bang Province compared with *G. kadoorieorum* (Yang and Chan 2015). Length given in mm.

	<i>G. luyi</i> (type series, Guangxi, China, n=6)	<i>G. luyi</i> (Lang Son) (n=1)	<i>G. luyi</i> (Cao Bang) (n=6)	<i>G. kadoorieorum</i> (n=5)
SVL	—	112.13	78.93-121.21 (104.0±18.4)	68.9-118 (104.28±20.3)
TaL	—	62.42	54.95-65.67 (58.37±6.25)	59.8-69.5 (60.59±5.38)
AG	—	53.41	36.58-60.1 (49.41±9.24)	30.5-55.6 (49.3±10.61)
HL	—	28.92	21.74-30.68 (27.9±4.12)	18.3-30.5 (26.82±4.98)
HW	—	20.46	14.99-21.8 (18.72±3.09)	12.5-20.4 (18.28±3.46)
HH	—	12.85	7.89-14.95 (11.38±2.82)	8.3-13.3 (11.64±1.98)
SE	—	12.24	9.13-12.87 (11.35±1.71)	7.6-12.6 (11.28±2.11)
EE	—	11.58	8.35-12.36 (10.23±1.78)	6.5-10.9 (9.5±1.77)
SVL:TaL	—	1.79	1.35-2.34 (1.86±0.42)	1.15-1.83 (1.56±0.36)
SVL:HL	—	3.88	3.51-3.96 (3.71±0.17)	3.77-3.98 (3.88±0.08)
SVL:AG	—	2.09	2.07-2.17 (2.11±0.06)	2.05-2.26 (2.13±0.08)
HL:HW	—	1.41	1.39-1.66 (1.49±0.1)	1.39-1.5 (1.47±0.05)
SE:EE	—	1.06	1.03-1.23 (1.11±0.08)	1.14-1.25 (1.19±0.04)
SPL	9-12 (9.5±0.55)	10/9	10-12 (10.92±0.67)	10-11 (10.3±0.48)
IFL	9-11 (10±0.63)	10/10	8-11 (9.9±0.9)	9
N	—	9/9	6-8 (7.25±0.75)	6-7 (6.2±0.42)
IN	—	2	3-1 (1.5±0.84)	2
PostIN	—	6	3-5 (4.0±0.89)	3-9 (5.2±2.49)
PM	2-4 (3±0.89)	5	2-5 (3.83±0.98)	4-5 (4.8±0.45)
GP	—	8	7-11 (8.67±1.37)	8-11 (9.6±1.52)
PO	14-17 (15.8±1.17)	—	—	15-19 (16.7±1.16)
CIL	57-61 (59.5±1.87)	59/60	50-56 (53.83±1.75)	47-54 (51.7±2.58)
MB	119-144 (134.5±12)	122	105-132 (118.5±11.47)	124-132 (129.2±3.11)
GST	9-14 (12.2±1.34)	11/12	9-12 (11.2±0.94)	11-13 (12±1.05)
TL	33-34 (33.8±0.75)	31	32-35 (33.3±1.21)	30-34 (32.6±1.67)
DTR	—	22	19-23 (21.5±1.52)	22-24 (23.2±0.84)
LF1	—	9/10	9-10 (9.83±0.39)	10-11 (10.2±0.42)
LF4	—	19/20	19-20 (19.54±0.69)	17-19 (17.8±0.79)
LT1	—	11/9	9-10 (9.9±0.32)	10-11 (10.6±0.52)
LT4	21-24 (23.5±1.38)	24/24	22-25 (23.5±1.08)	21-24 (22.3±0.95)
PP (male)	23-29 (26±2.58)	—	17-24 (20.5±4.95) (n=2)	26-28 (26.75±0.96)
PP (female)	—	22 (pitted)	18-24 (20.0±3.5) (pitted, n=3)	Absent
PAT	—	2/2	1-2 (1.75±0.45)	1-2 (1.4±0.52)

on the ground at an elevation of eight m above sea level. This sighting is the first observation of *G. catbaensis* in immediate proximity to the sea and provides an extended distribution range from forested areas to completely open areas close to the sea. In addition, first evidence for the occurrence of *G. catbaensis* on a small island within the Ha Long Bay is recorded based on a photo documentation by a tourist (Fig. 3D). The specimen was observed on the wall of a limestone cave on a very small offshore island. Based on color pattern and discernible scalation, the photographed specimen revealed to be *G. catbaensis*, although not all diagnostic characters for that species

could be confirmed due to the lack of a voucher specimen.

Population status: During the present study, *G. catbaensis* and *G. luyi* were found along five and seven transects, respectively. A total of 43 individuals of *G. catbaensis* and 15 individuals of *G. luyi* were captured. Based on an estimated invisibility rate index of 0.6, the *G. catbaensis* population on Cat Ba Island was estimated to comprise 16, 24, and 16 individuals in May, July, and August, respectively (Table 1). Furthermore, the encounter rates of *G. catbaensis* were always higher in Viet Hai

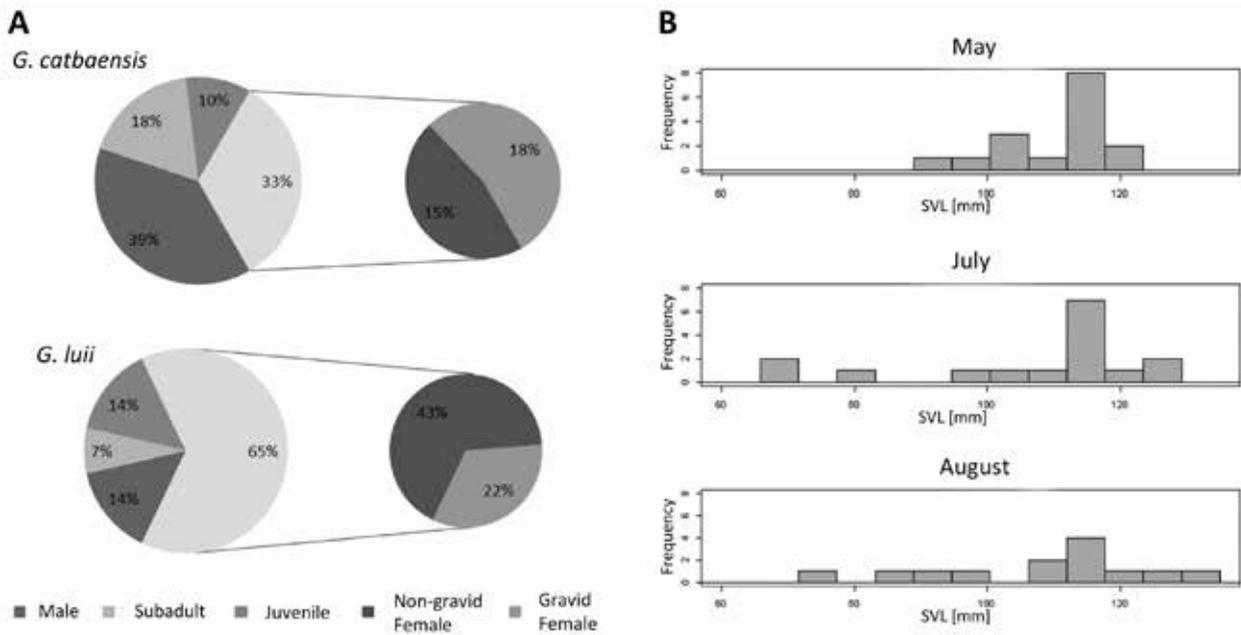


Fig. 4. A: Average population structure of *Goniurosaurus catbaensis* and a continental *G. luyi* population from Cao Bang Province (May–August vs. June, respectively); **B:** Frequency histogram of Snout-vent length of *G. catbaensis* for the months May, July, and August.

Commune than in other sites near the headquarters of Cat Ba NP, where more tourists frequented. In comparison, the continental subpopulation of *G. luyi* was estimated to comprise about 21 individuals within the investigated site (Table 1). Monthly mean densities of *G. catbaensis* ranged between 1 and 1.3 individuals per km of surveyed transect, while densities were generally higher in Viet Hai Commune than in other sites within Cat Ba NP (Table 1; Fig. 4). With regard to temporal variations, the highest density of *G. catbaensis* was observed during the month of August compared to May and July. In comparison, the continental subpopulation of *G. luyi* was estimated at the density of 0.8 individuals per km/transect, slightly lower than the density of *G. catbaensis*.

The investigated population of *G. catbaensis* on average consisted mainly of adult males, followed by adult females, subadults, and juveniles (39%, 33%, 18%, 10%, respectively; see Fig. 4). In comparison, the population structure of continental *G. luyi* slightly differed, with adult females constituting the major proportion of the local subpopulation, followed by adult males, juveniles, and subadults (65%, 14%, 14%, 7%, respectively, see Fig. 4). Females were more abundant in populations of *G. luyi* than in those of *G. catbaensis* (Fig. 4). However, population structures did not differ significantly between the two cryptic species ($\text{Chi}^2 = 5.2$; $\text{df} = 3$; $p = 0.158$). Most of the observed adult females were gravid (33% in Cao Bang vs. 54% on Cat Ba) between May and July. In July, all five encountered females of *G. catbaensis* were gravid, while no gravid females were observed in August. Frequency histograms of SVL showed a tendency of a monthly shift in presence of age classes in *G. catbaensis* ($\text{Chi}^2 = 1.227$, $\text{df} = 6$, $p = 0.9755$; Fig. 4). Individuals with SVL less than 90 mm were only found

from July onwards. Similarly, animals with SVL larger than 120 mm were observed from July onward, while the largest individuals (SVL up to 110 mm) were recorded in August (Fig. 4).

Discussion

Distribution: While most of the *Goniurosaurus* species are endemic and restricted to a small distribution range, our new record of *G. luyi* from Lang Son Province extended the distribution of this species in northern Vietnam. However, the distribution range of *G. luyi* probably overlaps with its cryptic relatives, i.e., *G. araneus*, *G. kadoorieorum*, and *G. kwangsiensis* (Chen et al. 2014; Yang and Chan 2015). Chen et al. (2014) indicated that *G. luyi* and *G. araneus* occur sympatrically in Guangxi Province, southern China, being only divided by a river system as a geographic boundary, which also is the barrier for *G. yingdeensis* and *G. indet.* The recently described *G. kadoorieorum* and *G. kwangsiensis* were also discovered from Guangxi Province, although information about exact locality was not provided (Yang and Chan 2015). Our morphological investigation of *G. luyi* from Vietnam revealed no distinct morphological differences between *G. luyi* and *G. kadoorieorum*. Thus, the validity of the newly described *G. kadoorieorum* should be verified by genetic analyses in the future. A similar case of cryptic diversity within a small geographic range is found in the *G. kuroiwae* complex, consisting of five species, in the Ryukyu Archipelago, Japan (Chen et al. 2014). Definite overlaps in distribution ranges of different *Goniurosaurus* species have only been reported for less closely related congeners, *G. lichtenfelderi* and *G.*

luii thus far. Although *G. luii* is the second known species of *Goniurosaurus* (after *G. huuliensis*) from Lang Son Province, they are not sympatric inhabitants. While *G. luii* was recorded from northern Lang Son, *G. huuliensis* had been only recorded from Huu Lien Nature Reserve in the southern part of the province. It can be assumed that the two species are geographically separated, however exact distribution boundaries have not yet been identified.

At present, *G. catbaensis* is endemic to Cat Ba Archipelago and it is expected to be found on other offshore islands in Ha Long Bay. Besides, other reptile species such as *Pseudocalotes brevipes* and *Rhynchophis boulengeri* have been observed at the coastline of Cat Ba Island, while *R. boulengeri* was even observed swimming in the ocean (Nguyen et al. 2011). In addition, two specimens of the *Gekko palmatus* complex were sighted on a small offshore island in Cat Ba Archipelago in 2015. These findings highlight the potential of Cat Ba Archipelago and Ha Long Bay as a laboratory for future studies to understand island biogeography of tropic lizards. These studies are recommended to investigate species communities, species relationships, and explore if similar speciation processes are underway on these small offshore islands comparable to those reported in *Anolis* lizards on Caribbean islands (e.g., Losos and Schluter 2000; Losos and Thorpe 2004).

Population status: Species with restricted distribution ranges are especially vulnerable to anthropogenic threats, such as habitat loss or degradation, overexploitation, and climatic changes (Hanski 1991; Reed et al. 2003; Traill et al. 2007). The population size plays a crucial role in long term survival of species, and a minimum viable size of at least 3,000–7,000 individuals is required to maintain a stable population over a longer time period (Reed et al. 2003; Traill et al. 2007). Preliminary estimates of *G. catbaensis* revealed a small population size that varied monthly between 16 and 24 individuals. These values only reflect the situation at the two known sites of the species on the island and might not capture the population over the entire range of the taxon. We assume that future surveys will probably uncover further occurrences, which is supported by the recent sighting of potential *G. catbaensis* on a small offshore island. However, *G. catbaensis* is still relatively restricted in its distribution and exclusively relies on the presence of limestone habitats in remote areas. Thus, the total population size of the species is assumed to be relatively small, and not exceeding the size of a minimum viable population.

Accordingly, *G. catbaensis* had been found in a fairly low density of 1.2 individuals per km, which only occurs in the sites containing suitable habitats such as limestone cliffs and caves. The habitats only cover a portion of the Cat Ba Archipelago, since karst formations alone represent only one of several ecosystems present on Cat Ba Island with an area of about 170 km² (CBBR Authority,

2013). Our findings suggest that higher abundances of *G. catbaensis* were generally found in remote sites, which were less frequently visited by tourists. The results might indicate a negative impact of tourism on the population of *G. catbaensis*. As tourism is developing rapidly on the island, wild populations and suitable habitats are likely to steadily decrease in the future.

A comparative investigation of the continental *G. luii* population in Cao Bang Province revealed similar size estimations of about 21 individuals (vs. 16–24 individuals of *G. catbaensis* on Cat Ba), based on the same number of surveyed transects. The sites, where *G. luii* was observed, were remote and far away from human settlements. This observation affirms our assumption that the presence of humans negatively impacts the occurrence of *Goniurosaurus* species.

Population structure: In both investigated species, adult females represented the dominant group, which might be an indication for a territorial or aggressive behavior between males, which probably disperse more than females (Vitt and Pianka 1994). The proportion of males tends to be higher in the island population of *G. catbaensis* compared with the continental population of *G. luii*. This finding might be explained by the limited dispersal ability on the island due to limited availability of suitable habitats. Accordingly, the fact that relatively higher numbers of gravid females were found on the island, compared with the continental population, might have resulted from the respective higher density of males in the population. Furthermore, gravid females in both populations of *G. catbaensis* and *G. luii* were encountered between May and July, confirming the observation of Grismer et al. (1999) that July is the reproduction season of *G. luii*.

Implications for Conservation

Tiger Geckos, in particular *Goniurosaurus luii* and *G. araneus*, have been used for traditional medicine by local people and became very popular in the trade since the 1990s (Grismer et al. 1999; Chen et al. 2014; Yang and Chan 2015; Ziegler et al. 2015). Grismer et al. (1999) reported an exemplary case of one dealer exporting over 10,000 individuals of *G. luii* and *G. araneus* to the USA for the pet trade. Already before its description in 1999, *G. luii* had been overexploited for commercial use in China, which presumably led to the extirpation from its type locality in Pingxiang (Grismer et al. 1999; Stuart et al. 2006). According to Yang and Chan (2015), local villagers mentioned to have been paid by dealers for collecting large quantities of live *Goniurosaurus*, which is a common scenario within the non-sustainable reptile trade (e.g., Huang et al. 2008). A similar scenario might have taken place simultaneously in Vietnam. As a result, even extensive field surveys, e.g., Nguyen et al. (2009), Orlov et al. (2008), Ziegler et al. (2008), and by our team in

2010 and 2014 in Cao Bang Province, failed to record any specimen of *G. araneus*.

These findings emphasize how fast local populations of range-restricted species can be extirpated due to over-exploitation (e.g., Huang et al. 2008; van Schingen et al. 2015). The international demand for *Goniurosaurus* species among hobbyists still remains high. The long term monitoring of local pet markets and internet sources by Yang and Chan (2015) showed that almost all *Goniurosaurus* species are subject to extensive pet trade. Sometimes, the species fetch alarmingly high prices. Observations by our team confirmed the regular trade in respective species in international reptile fairs, e.g., in Hamm and Dortmund, Germany, or on internet platforms such as www.terrarakistik.com. The species are available for sale from as low as 15 EUR up to several hundred Euros per individual.

In many cases, the origin of the species and their legal export permits remain questionable. Among them, *G. catbaensis* has been observed in European pet markets, even though it was only described relatively recently. Anthropogenic threats, such as poaching, habitat degradation, and introduced predators together with a small distribution range of 1,600 km² imperiled the insular *G. kuroiwae* species group, endemic to the Ryukyu Archipelago of Japan, leading to its inclusion in the IUCN Red List as Endangered (Ota 2010). Yang and Chan (2015) argued that most *Goniurosaurus* species from China and Vietnam are similarly or even more threatened than the Japanese species, since Japan is more advanced in species conservation management.

Our study suggests that the insular *G. catbaensis* is very sensitive to the impacts of humans, and subject to overexploitation to supply the international pet trade. Besides illegal collection, habitat destruction for touristic purposes has dramatically increased the pressure on the wild population of *G. catbaensis*. According to interviews with local villagers, several karst areas of Cat Ba Island, comprising unique and important habitats for the species, have recently been converted to a huge tourist resort and further tourism development has been planned. Such development would seriously threaten *G. catbaensis* and the unique fauna and flora of the Cat Ba Archipelago, which requires urgent conservation measures to protect the species from imminent extinction.

Recommendations

Due to the restricted distribution range of *G. catbaensis* and the rising anthropogenic threats to its natural populations, we recommend to include this species in the IUCN Red List. Since this study provided evidence for negative impact of tourism on the presence of *G. catbaensis*, the public access to core habitats of the species needs to be restricted by local authorities. Based on our results, *G. catbaensis* was found more frequently at some spots in the vicinity of Viet Hai Village. The sites should there-

fore be considered a priority zone for the species conservation. Future surveys will evaluate the relevance of further sites as key habitats for conservation of *G. catbaensis*. Furthermore, the Vietnamese authorities should strictly control illegal collection of *G. catbaensis* as well as other *Goniurosaurus* species. Currently, all *Goniurosaurus* species are considered to be threatened by commercial use (Chen et al. 2014; Grismer et al. 1999; Yang and Chan 2015; Ziegler et al. 2015) and the international demand for Tiger Geckos still remains high. Because of their restricted distribution ranges and low densities, all *Goniurosaurus* species are especially vulnerable to unsustainable harvest, which already caused the local extinction of at least one species. As a first step to reduce poaching and to control the international trade in *Goniurosaurus* species, we further recommend assessment of trade status for all species of the genus *Goniurosaurus* with a view to including them in the appendices of the Convention of International Trade in Endangered species (CITES).

Acknowledgments.—For supporting field work and issuing relevant permits, we thank the authorities of the Cat Ba National Park, Hai Phong City, Hai Phong City, Minh Le Pham from the management department of Ha Long Bay, and Forest Protection Department of Cao Bang Province. We are very thankful to H.A. Thi, M. Bernardes, and L. Barthel for their assistance in the field, and to Jakob Hallermann (Hamburg), Vinh Quang Luu (Hanoi), and Ulrich Schepp (Bonn) for commenting on a first draft of the manuscript. We are grateful to T. Pagel and C. Landsberg (Cologne Zoo), M. Bonkowski (University of Cologne), C.X. Le and T.H. Tran (IEBR, Hanoi), and M.T. Nguyen, L.V. Vu (VNMN, Hanoi) for their support of research and conservation work in Vietnam, and H.T. Ngo for laboratory assistance. Nature conservation-based biodiversity research is mainly funded by Cologne Zoo, the Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources (IEBR), the Amphibian Conservation Fund of German zoo associations (Verband der Zoologischen Gärten, VdZ, e.V.) and private participants in the German-speaking region as well as Stiftung Artenschutz, the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA), the Nagao Natural Environment Foundation (Japan), the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA), the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (VIE 1143441) and the University of Cologne. Research of T.T. Nguyen is funded by the President of the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology (VAST). Cologne Zoo is partner of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA): Conservation Project 07011 (Herpetodiversity Research).

Literature Cited

Cat Ba Biosphere Reserve Authority. 2013. *Cat Ba Archipelago Biosphere Reserve*. Third edition. Hai

- Phong City, Vietnam. 28 p.
- Chen T-B, Meng Y-J, Jiang K, Li P-P, Wen B-H, Lu W, Lazell J, Hou M. 2014. New record of the leopard gecko *Goniurosaurus araneus* (Squamata: Eublepharidae) for China and habitat partitioning between geographically and phylogenetically close leopard geckos. *IRCF Reptiles & Amphibians* 21(1): 16–27.
- Clements R, Sodhi NS, Schilthuizen M, Peter KLN-G. 2006. Limestone Karsts of Southeast Asia: Imperiled Arks of Biodiversity. *Bioscience* 56(9): 733–742.
- Grismer LL, Brian, EV, Viets E, Boyle LJ. 1999. Two new continental species of *Goniurosaurus* (Squamata: Eublepharidae) with a phylogeny and evolutionary classification of the genus. *Journal of Herpetology* 33(3): 382–393.
- Grismer LL, Ngo TV, Grismer JL. 2010. A colorful new species of insular rock gecko (*Cnemaspis* Strauch 1887) from southern Vietnam. *Zootaxa* 2352: 46–58.
- Grismer LL, Ota H, Tanaka S. 1994. Phylogeny, classification, and biogeography of *Goniurosaurus kuroiwae* (Squamata: Eublepharidae) from the Ryukyu Archipelago, Japan, with description of a new subspecies. *Zoological Science* 11: 319–335.
- Grismer LL, Shi HT, Orlov NL, Ananjeva NB. 2002. A new species of *Goniurosaurus* (Squamata: Eublepharidae) from Hainan Island, China. *Journal of Herpetology* 36(2): 217–224. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1565994>
- Hanski I. 1991. Single-species metapopulation dynamics. Pp. 17 In: Editors, Gilpin ME, Hanski I. *Metapopulation Dynamics: Empirical and Theoretical Investigations*. Academic Press, London, United Kingdom. 340 p.
- Huang CM, Yu H, Wu Z, Li JB, Wei FW, Gong MH. 2008. Population and conservation strategies for the Chinese crocodile lizard (*Shinisaurus crocodilurus*) in China. *Animal Biodiversity and Conservation* 31: 63–70.
- Kearse M, Moir R, Wilson A, Stones-Havas S, Cheung M, Sturrock S, Buxton S, Coope A, Markowitz S, Duran C, Thierer T, Ashton B, Mentjies P, Drummond A. 2012. Geneious Basic: an integrated and extendable desktop software platform for the organization and analysis of sequence data. *Bioinformatics* 28: 1,647–1,649.
- Lehmann T. 2013. The reptile diversity of karst formations in northeastern Vietnam. M.S. Thesis, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Bonn, Germany. 130 p.
- Losos JB, Thorpe RS. 2004. Evolutionary Diversification of Caribbean Anolis Lizards. Pp. 322–344 In: *Adaptive Speciation*. Editors, Dieckmann U, Doebeli M, Metz JAJ, Tautz D. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England. 488 p.
- Losos JB, Schluter D. 2000. Analysis of an evolutionary species–area relationship. *Nature* 408: 847–850. doi:10.1038/35048558
- Nguyen SV, Ho CT, Nguyen TQ. 2009. *Herpetofauna of Vietnam*. Edition Chimaira, Frankfurt am Main, Germany. 768 p.
- Nguyen T Q, Stenke R, Nguyen HX, Ziegler T. 2011. The terrestrial reptile fauna of the biosphere reserve Cat Ba Archipelago, Hai Phong, Vietnam. In: Editor, Schuchmann K-L. *Tropical Vertebrates in a Changing World. Bonner Zoologische Monographien* 57: 99–115.
- Orlov NL, Ryabov SA, Nguyen TT, Nguyen TQ, Ho CT. 2008. A new species of *Goniurosaurus* (Sauria: Gekkota: Eublepharidae) from north Vietnam. *Russian Journal of Herpetology* 15(3): 229–244.
- Ota H. 2010. *Goniurosaurus kuroiwae*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2015.2. Available: www.iucnredlist.org [Accessed: 09 July 2015].
- Palumbi SR, Martin A, Romano S, McMillan WO, Stice L, Grabowski G. 1991. *The Simple Fool's Guide to PCR*. Department of Zoology and Kewalo Marine Laboratory, Hawaii, USA. 94 p.
- Reed DH, O'Grady JJ, Brook BW, Ballou JD, Frankham R. 2003. Estimates of minimum viable population sizes for vertebrates and factors influencing those estimates. *Biological Conservation* 113: 23–34.
- Seufer H, Kaverkin Y, Kirschner A. 2005. The genus *Goniurosaurus* Barbour, 1908 (Oriental Leopard Geckos). Pp. 133–175 In: *Die Lidgeckos: Pflege, Zucht und Lebensweise*. Kirschner & Seuffer Publishing, Karlsruhe, Germany. 238 p.
- Stuart BL, Rhodin AG, Grismer LL, Hansel T. 2006. Scientific description can imperil species. *Science* 312: 1137. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.312.5777.1137b>
- Stuart YE, Losos JB, Algar AC. 2012. The island-mainland species turnover relationship. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 279(1744). doi: <http://rspb.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/279/1744/4071>
- Traill LW, Bradshaw CJA, Brook BW. 2007. Minimum viable population size: A meta-analysis of 30 years of published estimates. *Biological Conservation* 139: 159–166.
- van Schingen M, Pham CT, Thi HA, Bernardes M, Hecht VL, Nguyen TQ, Bonkowski M, Ziegler T. 2014. Current status of the Crocodile Lizard *Shinisaurus crocodilurus* Ahl, 1930 in Vietnam with implications for conservation measures. *Revue Suisse de Zoologie* 121(3): 1–15.
- van Schingen M, Schepp U, Pham CT, Nguyen TQ, Ziegler T. 2015. Last chance to see? Threats to and use of the Crocodile Lizard. *Traffic Bulletin* 27: 19–26.
- Vitt LJ, Pianka ER (Editors). 1994. *Lizard Ecology: Historical and Experimental Perspectives*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, USA. 403 p.
- Volkov I, Banavar JR, Hubbell SP, Maritan A. 2003. Neutral theory and relative species abundance in ecology.

First population assessment of two cryptic Tiger Geckos

Nature 424: 1,035–1,037.

- Vu NT, Nguyen TQ, Grismer LL, Ziegler T. 2006. First Record of the Chinese Leopard Gecko, *Goniurosaurus luii* (Reptilia: Eublepharidae) from Vietnam. *Current Herpetology* 25: 93–95.
- Yang J-H, Chan BP-L. 2015. Two new species of the genus *Goniurosaurus* (Squamata: Sauria: Eublepharidae) from southern China. *Zootaxa* 3980(1): 67–80.
- Wang YY, Yang JH, Grismer LL. 2013. A new species of *Goniurosaurus* (Squamata: Eublepharidae) from

Libo, Guizhou Province, China. *Herpetologica* 69(2): 214–226. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1655/herpetologica-d-12-00084>

- Ziegler T, Nguyen, TQ. 2015. Neues von den Forschungs- und Naturschutzprojekten in Vietnam und Laos. *Zeitschrift des Kölner Zoos* 58(2): 79–108.
- Ziegler T, Nguyen TQ, Schmitz A, Stenke R, Rösler H. 2008. A new species of *Goniurosaurus* from Cat Ba Island, Hai Phong, northern Vietnam (Squamata: Eublepharidae). *Zootaxa* 1771: 16–30.



Hai Ngoc Ngo is a young scientist who has been involved in several projects at the Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources (IEBR) since 2013, and has been a researcher of the Vietnam National Museum of Nature since 2014. He recently graduated with his M.S. in 2015 at Ha Noi University of Science. He has participated in numerous field surveys to study herpetology in Vietnam and has much experience in field research and conservation work. He is now focusing on ecology, phylogeny, and conservation of endemic endangered lizards in Vietnam.



Thomas Ziegler has been the Curator of the Aquarium/Terrarium Department of the Cologne Zoo since 2003. He is also the coordinator of the Cologne Zoo's Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Projects in Vietnam and Laos. Thomas studied biology at the University Bonn (Germany), and conducted his diploma and doctoral thesis at the Zoological Research Museum Alexander Koenig in Bonn, focusing on zoological systematics and amphibian and reptile diversity. As a zoo curator and project coordinator he tries to combine *in situ* and *ex situ* approaches, viz., to link zoo biological aspects with diversity research and conservation in the Cologne Zoo, in rescue stations and breeding facilities in Vietnam, and in Indochina's last remaining forests. Beginning in February 2009 he has been an Associate Professor at the Zoological Institute of Cologne University. Since 1994, Thomas has published 355 papers and books, mainly dealing with herpetodiversity. He was involved in the first record of *Goniurosaurus luii* from Vietnam (Vu et al. 2006) and in the discovery of *Goniurosaurus catbaensis* (Ziegler et al. 2008).



Truong Quang Nguyen is a researcher at the Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources (IEBR), Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology (VAST), and is a member of the Biodiversity and Nature Conservation project of the Cologne Zoo. He finished his Ph.D. in 2011 at the Zoological Research Museum Alexander Koenig (ZFMK) and the University of Bonn, Germany (DAAD Fellow). From 2011 to 2014 he worked as a postdoctoral student in the Zoological Institute at the University of Cologne. He conducted numerous field surveys and is the co-author of seven books and more than 150 papers relevant to biodiversity research and conservation in Southeast Asia. His research interests are systematics, ecology, and phylogeny of reptiles and amphibians of Southeast Asia.



Cuong The Pham is a Ph.D. candidate and researcher at the Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources (IEBR) Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology (VAST). He is member of the Cologne Zoo's Biodiversity and Nature conservation projects in Vietnam. He has published several papers mainly dealing with Vietnam's herpetodiversity. He is experienced in biodiversity and field research and has conducted numerous field surveys in Vietnam.



Tao Thien Nguyen is the curator of herpetology and the current head of the Department of Nature Conservation at the Vietnam National Museum of Nature (VNMN) of the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology. His research interests are in the taxonomy, evolutionary origin, and diversification of amphibians and reptiles, as well the practical elucidation of the phylogeny of various amphibian and reptile groups. Tao obtained his Ph.D. at the Kyoto University, Japan with a focus on the molecular and morphological systematics and distribution pattern of various rhacophorid species. He has extensive experience in taxonomy and ecology of amphibians and reptiles throughout Vietnam. Since 2007, he has published more than 70 papers on herpetology.



Minh Duc Le has been working on conservation-related issues in Southeast Asia for more than 15 years. His work focuses on biotic survey, wildlife trade, and conservation genetics of various wildlife groups in Indochina. He is currently working on projects which characterize genetic diversity of highly threatened reptiles and mammals in the region. He also pioneers the application of molecular tools in surveying critically endangered species in Vietnam. Minh has long been involved in studying the impact of the wildlife trade on biodiversity conservation in Vietnam, and is developing a multidisciplinary framework to address the issue in the country.



Mona van Schingen is Ph.D. candidate at the Zoological Institute of the University of Cologne and the Cologne Zoo, Germany, where she also graduated with her B.S. in Biology in 2011 and her M.S. in 2014, respectively. Since 2011 she has been investigating the lizard fauna of Southeast Asia integrated in the working group of Thomas Ziegler and is highly experienced in tropical field research, conservation work, and project management. Her current research is focused on ecology, population dynamics, and conservation of endangered, specialist and range-restricted lizard species in Vietnam.