

## Catalogue of American Amphibians and Reptiles.

Henderson, R.W., R. Powell, J.C. Daltry, and M.L. Day. 1996.  
*Alsophis antiquae*.

***Alsophis antiquae* Parker**  
Antiguan Racer

*Alsophis leucomelas antiquae* Parker, 1933:158. Type-locality, "Antigua." Syntypes, British Museum of Natural History (BMNH) 1946.1.4.46, 1946.1.4.47 (re-registered numbers assigned after World War II), juveniles, both females, collected by Mr. Gardiner, date of collection unknown (not examined by authors).

*Alsophis antiquae*: Parker, 1936:228.

*Alsophis antillensis antiquae*: Schwartz, 1966:216.

• **Content.** Two subspecies are recognized: *A. a. antiquae* and *A. a. sajdaki*.

• **Definition.** This moderately sized (maximum known SVL 711 mm) colubrid has 184-201 (males) or 185-201 (females) ventrals, 116-126 (males) or 95-105 (females) subcaudals, 19 (occasionally 21) dorsal scale rows at midbody, 8/8 supralabials, usually 10/10 infralabials, 1/1 or 2/2 preoculars, 2/2 postoculars, 1+2/1+2 temporals, and 1/1 loreals. The frontal scute is long and narrow. The cloacal scute (= anal plate) is divided. See subspecific diagnoses for descriptions of dorsal and ventral color and patterns.

• **Descriptions.** In addition to those of Parker (1933, 1936), descriptions are in Henderson (1989 [1990]) and Schwartz and Henderson (1991).

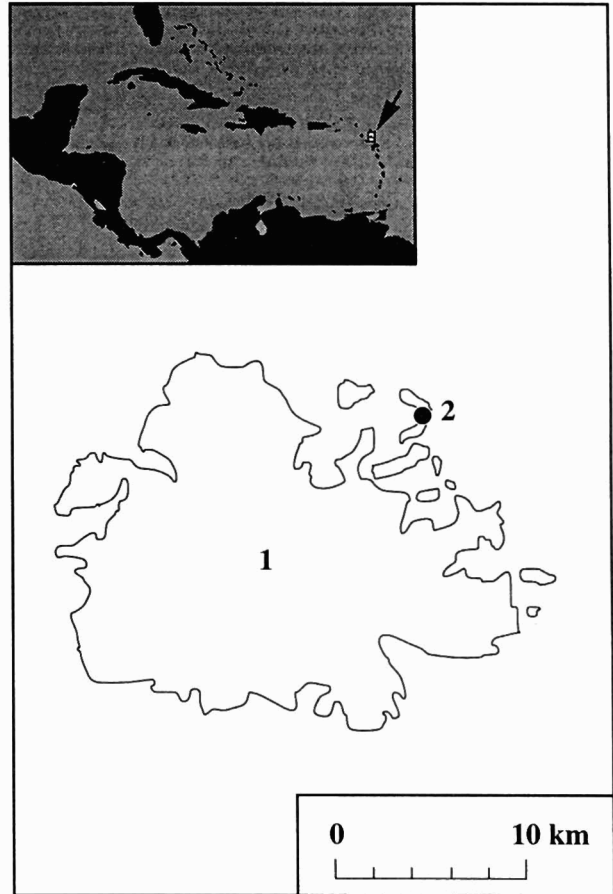
• **Illustrations.** Lazell (1967) included a black-and-white photograph of an individual from Great Bird Island. Henderson (1989 [1990]) provided a black-and-white photograph of *A. a. sajdaki* and drawings illustrating the dorsal patterns of *A. a. antiquae* and *A. a. sajdaki*. A color photograph of a specimen from Great Bird Island appeared in Day and Daltry (1996).

• **Distribution.** This Antiguan Bank endemic is known only from Antigua (but see Remarks) and Great Bird Island. The range has been illustrated in Schwartz and Henderson (1991).

• **Fossil Record.** Wing et al. (1968) referred Holocene material from Antigua to *Alsophis leucomelas* (= *A. antillensis*), and



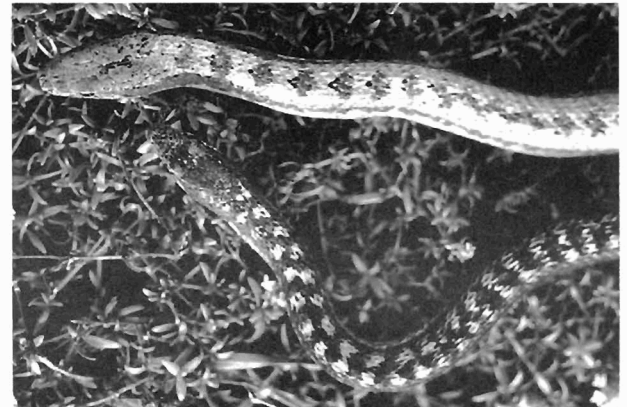
**Figure 1.** An adult *Alsophis antiquae sajdaki* from Great Bird Island, St. George Parish, Antigua (photograph by Mark L. Day).



**Map.** Range of *Alsophis antiquae* (modified from Schwartz and Henderson, 1991). Type-localities are too imprecise to plot. The nominate subspecies probably has been extirpated (see text), but is presumed to have occurred islandwide on Antigua proper.

Pregill et al. (1988) referred to additional Holocene material from Antigua and Barbuda to *Alsophis* cf. *A. antillensis*. Pregill et al. (1994) reported late Holocene *Alsophis* vertebrae from Barbuda, and assumed that they represented *A. antiquae*.

• **Pertinent Literature.** Schwartz (1966) discussed the relationships of *Alsophis antillensis* (including *A. a. antiquae*) in



**Figure 2.** Pattern variation in *Alsophis antiquae sajdaki* (photograph by Mark L. Day).

regard to *A. sanctaecrucis*. Lazell (1967) reported the "rediscovery" of the presumably extinct species on Great Bird Island (also see Remarks). Whether Maglio (1970) examined any specimens of *A. antiguae* is not possible to determine. At that time, this species was considered a subspecies of *A. antillensis*, and Maglio did not indicate whether any differences in the characters he studied were applicable at the subspecies level. Pregill et al. (1988) presented evidence supporting the uniqueness of this taxon and an affinity with congeners of the northern Lesser Antilles (*A. rijersmai* and *A. rufiventris*). Sajdak and Henderson (1991) discussed the status of this species in their survey of Lesser Antillean racers. Schwartz and Henderson (1991) elevated this taxon to species status and presented information on distribution and natural history. Henderson and Sajdak (1996) presented information on diet. Rodríguez-Robles and Greene (1996) included this species in their study of ecological relationships of Greater Antillean snakes. Day and Daltry (1996) described conservation efforts on Great Bird Island.

The species is included in checklists by Barbour (1935, 1937), Schwartz and Thomas (1975), Schwartz et al. (1978), Schwartz and Henderson (1985), Henderson and Crother (1989), and Powell et al. (1996).

• **Nomenclatural History.** Originally described by Parker (1933) as a subspecies of *Alsophis leucomelas* (= *A. antillensis*), *A. antigua* was elevated to species status by Parker (1936) primarily on the basis of the narrow frontal scute and the low number of subcaudal scales. Schwartz (1966), without discussion, relegated this taxon to a subspecies of *A. antillensis*. Schwartz and Henderson (1991) again elevated *antiguae* to full species status.

Schwartz and Henderson (1988) noted that Martin (1838) described *Herpetodryas punctifer* from Antigua. Although the name could apply to *A. antiguae* and, if it did, *punctifer* should receive priority, no specimen associated with this name could be found. However, a specimen of *A. antillensis* was purchased by the British Museum from the "Zoological Society" as part of a collection in which Martin may have deposited the holotype. Because no evidence exists to suggest that this specimen is, in fact, Martin's holotype, and his description was inadequate, Schwartz and Henderson (1988) considered *H. punctifer* a *nomen nudum*.

• **Remarks.** The nominate subspecies has been extirpated, presumably due to the introduction of the mongoose. Despite several, at times intense efforts, over 90 years have passed since the last specimen of *A. a. antiguae* was taken (Henderson, 1989 [1990]). No substantiated reports of any kind are known from the "last 30 years or so" (K. Lindsay, Island Resources Foundation, in litt., 18 IX 1996) and extensive recent (in 1996) inquiries by J.C. Daltry, M.L. Day, and R. Powell suggested that no racers have been seen by Antiguans in the interim. Occasional reports still surface, however; for example, a snake found early in 1996 was discussed widely in the island media, but was a cornsnake (*Elaphe guttata*). Another juvenile specimen of the same species arrived on the island shortly thereafter in a crate of cabbages (K. Lindsay, in litt., 18 IX 1996). On the other hand, *A. a. sajdaki* on Great Bird Island is still extant (even after the 1995 hurricane season), although inhabiting an island with an area of only 0.083 km<sup>2</sup> (Day and Daltry, 1996). This population would appear to be extremely vulnerable to negative human or natural effects.

Frank and Ramus (1995) proposed the use of the common name "Antigua [*sic*] Racer."

• **Etymology.** The name *antiguae* refers to the Leeward island from which this species was described. The name *sajdaki* is a

patronym honoring R.A. Sajdak, "in fond remembrance of adventures shared in the pursuit of *Alsophis* on many West Indian islands" (Henderson, 1989 [1990]).

### 1. *Alsophis antiguae antiguae* Parker

*Alsophis leucomelas antiguae* Parker, 1933:158. See species synonymy.

*Alsophis antiguae*: Parker, 1936:228.

*Alsophis antillensis antiguae*: Schwartz, 1966:216.

*Alsophis antiguae antiguae*: Henderson, 1989 (1990):120.

• **Diagnosis.** This subspecies is characterized by 195-201 ( $\bar{x}$  = 198.2) ventrals and 312-327 ( $\bar{x}$  = 321.1) ventrals + subcaudals in males ( $n$  = 13). The dorsum is beige to taupe with a sharply defined pattern of contrasting colors forming discrete, black-outlined dark brown blotches, which may be connected in some specimens to form a broad, irregular middorsal stripe or lineate or ladder-like patterns. One specimen examined had dark brown postocular stripes extending on to the body as a lateral line before deteriorating into a series of small oblong blotches. The venter is heavily marked with black or dark brown, with the intensity and density of color increasing posteriorly.

### 2. *Alsophis antiguae sajdaki* Henderson

*Alsophis antiguae sajdaki* Henderson, 1989 (1990):119. Type-locality, "Great Bird Island, St. George Parish, Antigua." Holotype, University of Kansas Museum of Natural History (KU) 211059 (original field number ASFS V6789), an adult female, collected 11 August 1965 by Richard Thomas (examined by the senior author).

• **Diagnosis.** This subspecies is characterized by a reduced number of ventrals (185-190) and ventrals + subcaudals (303-309) in males. The dorsum may be nearly uniform taupe to pale gray with a barely discernible lineate pattern with any darker markings fading by midbody, strongly patterned and quite dark (especially in males), or predominantly chocolate brown with cream markings. The venter is pale taupe.

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