

1854

ANGOLOSaurus SKOOGI (ANDERSSON) —
A NEW RECORD FROM SOUTH WEST AFRICA
(REPTILES)

By

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Editorial Note

The present paper, which we have been given permission to reprint from *Cimbebasia*, 1963, No. 6, deals with *Angolosaurus skoogi*, one of the most interesting lizards of the Namib Desert. It appears to be strictly endemic to the sandy dunes and is known so far only from the northern part of this desert.

The species was first described by Andersson in 1916, on a single specimen collected in Porto Alexandre (Southern Angola) by a Mr. H. Skoog in 1912. Andersson then included it in the Plated Lizards of the genus *Gerrhosaurus*, which is well represented in South Africa by a number of species, and named it *G. skoogi* in honour of its discoverer. As Loveridge (*Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool. Harv.* 1942) had not seen this unique specimen, he suggested that such characters as the "sharp cutting jaws and coloration" described by Andersson might be due to preservation, and thus placed this form as a subspecies of *Gerrhosaurus validus*.

For 40 years no further specimens were found until in 1952, Dr. C. Koch (of the Transvaal Museum staff) secured two more specimens from the subcoastal dunes near Porto Alexandre. These topotypical specimens were studied by Dr. V. F. FitzSimons and proved to differ so markedly from the other known species of *Gerrhosaurus* as to warrant their being placed in a separate new genus of their own called *Angolosaurus* FitzSimons, 1953. During another Transvaal Museum Expedition to south-western Angola in 1954 some more of these lizards were collected in Porto Alexandre and, for the first time, their habits briefly described by FitzSimons (*Afr. Wild Life*, 1955, 9, 21-23, 3 photographs). Among other interesting observations, particular mention is made of the peculiar movements of this dune lizard as follows: — "When disturbed on the surface, they literally nose-dive into the softsand and, with an almost corkscrew wriggling of the body and violent trashing of the hindlegs, disappear within a second or so out of sight below the surface" (FitzSimons cit.).

Laurent in his recent paper on the reptiles and amphibia of Angola (*Diamang, Publ. Cult.*, 1964, 67) does not list this species.

A further find of *Angolosaurus skoogi* in South West Africa was made by Mrs. S. Steyn, Dr. W. Steyn and P. Motonane of the State Museum Windhoek on March

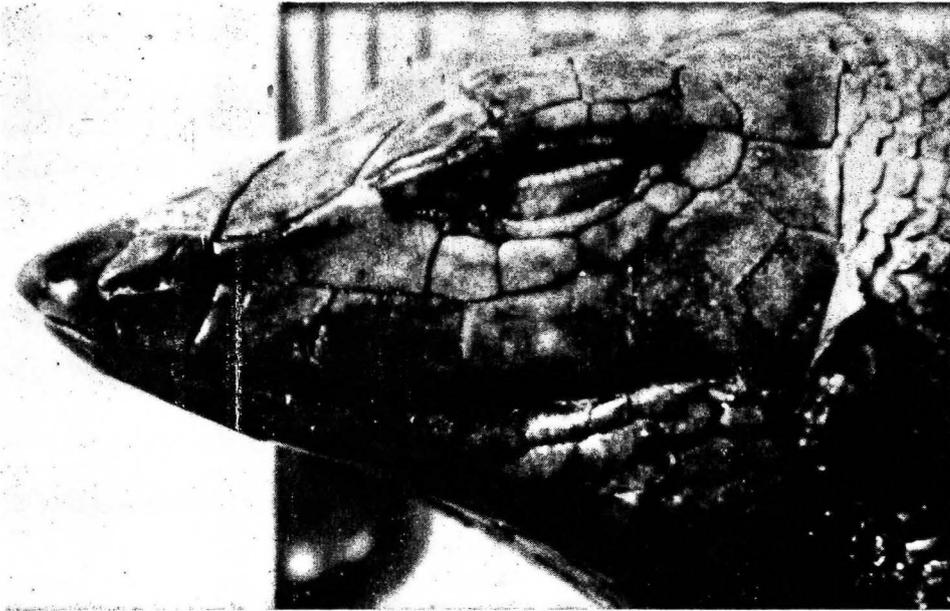


Fig. 1. *Angolosaurus skoogi*, CR2226A. Lateral view of head.

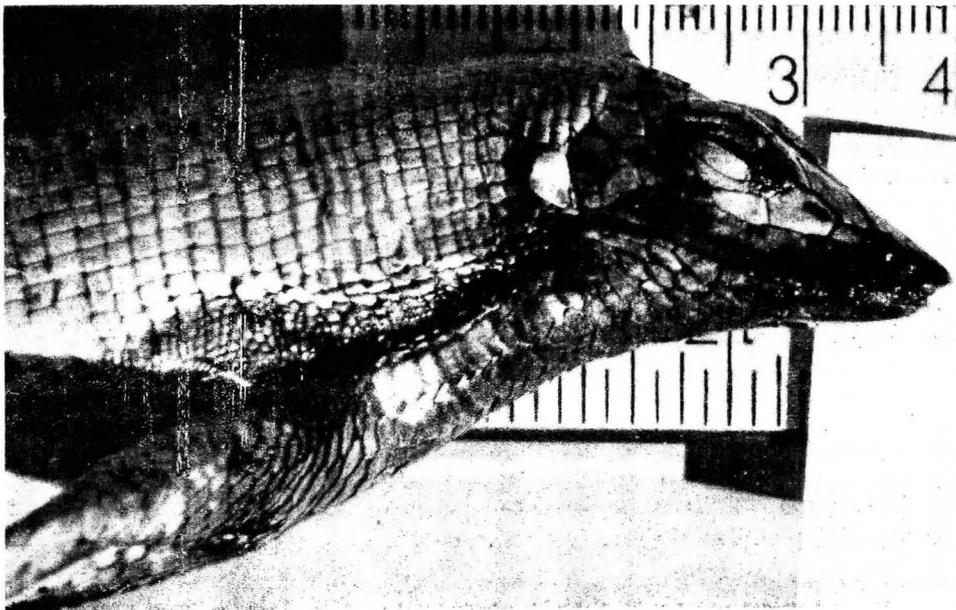


Fig. 2. *Angolosaurus skoogi*, CR2226B. Compare temporal scales with those in fig. 1.

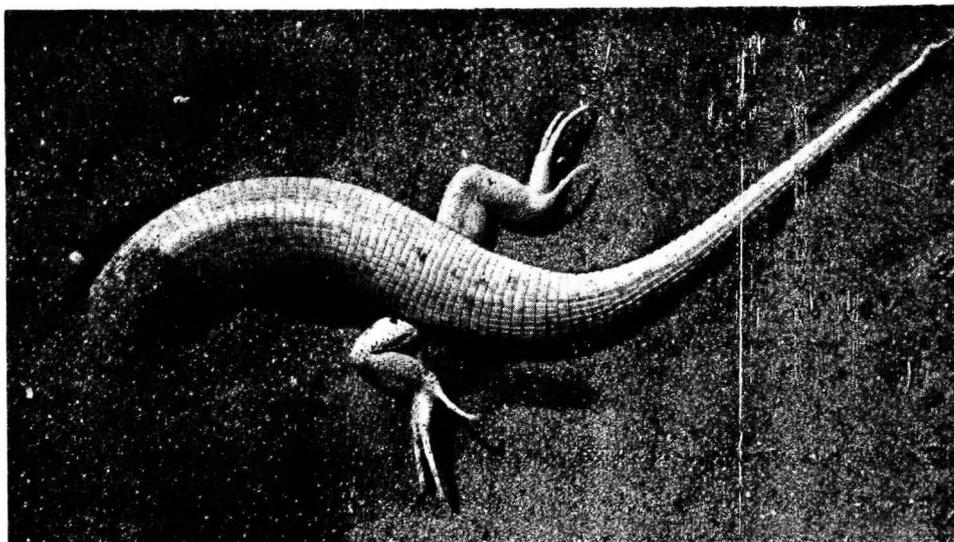


Fig. 3. *Angolosaurus skoogi* disappearing into the sand.

sheltering under these plants, they swiftly disappear into the sand when disturbed. They even do this when already under the shrubs. The depressed snout is pressed into the sand while digging with the forelimbs. The hindlimbs are used to push the body forwards, while the trunk and tail are swung rapidly and markedly from side to side in an alternating motion (fig. 3). *Angolosaurus skoogi* thus practices a kind of sand swimming, which leaves practically no trace on the spot where the animal disappeared into the sand. Two live specimens were kept in the laboratory for some time. These could remain submerged for 24 hours at a time. When they became used to their new surroundings after a few days, they could not easily be induced to submerge.

STOMACH CONTENTS. In the juveniles the stomach contained mostly vegetable matter with slight signs of tenebrionid beetle remains. In adults, the stomach contained a mixture of partly digested remains of *Acanthosicyos horrida* stems, grass and tenebrionid beetles. The stomachs of all the specimens investigated contained numerous small nematode parasites.

CONCLUSION. The South West African specimens have to be placed as *Angolosaurus skoogi*. They differ in certain characters from the existing descriptions of this species. These characters are all very variable, however. It is agreed with FitzSimons (1953) that *A. skoogi* is not closely related to *Gerrhosaurus validus*. There are some superficial resemblances between *A. skoogi* and *G. auritus*, and these are now being studied.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS. I should like to thank Prof. R. Mertens and Dr. K. Klemmer for allowing me to study a specimen of *A. skoogi* in the Senckenberg Institute study collection.

Angolosaurus skoogi: Dimensions in mm

Cat. No.	Head& Body	Tail	Forelimb	Hindlimb	Head-length	Head-breath
CR2226						
A ♂	140	125	40	61	24	17
B ♂	140	129	42	65	25	17
C ♂	139	134	41.5	60	21	14.5
D ♂	139	—	40	60	22	15
E ♂	138	140	37.5	58	23	17
F ♀	45	61	16	27.5	10	6
G ♂	56	—	18	26	13	6
H ♀	75.5	79	23	37	16	10.5
I ♂	70	—	20.5	33.5	15	10
CR2227						
A ♂	112	116.5	32	53	20	14
B ♀	114	100	29	44	19.5	12.5
C ♀		—	31	50	20	14