

Modest Forest Dragon *Hypsilurus modestus* from Moro, Southern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea

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Observer: Nick Baker.
Photographs by: Nick Baker.
Subject identified by: Nick Baker, Ulrich Manthey.

Location: 10 km southwest of Moro Airfield, Southern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea (PNG).
(Lat 06° 26.077'S, Long 143° 11.024'E)

Elevation: 1150 metres

Habitat: Secondary, forest-edge, adjacent to primary, lower montane forest on karst limestone.

Date and time: 06 May 2005, 12:51 hrs.

Identity of subject: Modest Forest Dragon, *Hypsilurus modestus* (Reptilia: Squamata: Agamidae).

Description of observation: A specimen with estimated snout-vent length of 8 cm, and an estimated tail length of 23 cm, was seen sunning itself on the trunk of a sapling at the edge of a narrow, oilfield service road passing through primary forest. The subject was rather shy, and quickly reoriented itself on the tree trunk after being disturbed.

Remarks: The habitat where the subject was found is typical of the karst limestone areas of Southern Highlands Province, PNG, which comprises primary, lower montane forest growing on steep slopes. The interior of such forest is typically dark and humid, with moss and lichen-covered tree trunks, but where the forest has been locally cleared for roads or small-scale development, a narrow belt of secondary forest develops which is dominated by fast-growing, sun-loving tree species. The lizard was sunning itself on such a tree (Fig 1.).

The lizard was identified as *Hypsilurus modestus* based on its bright green colour, the presence of bright, pale green bands on the posterior part of the dorsum, and banded limbs and tail, with the bands on the tail being more prominent in the anterior part (Fig 2.). A nuchal crest is evident comprising three widely-spaced enlarged scales (with possibly a fourth such scale, less enlarged and anterior to these three). There is a radial pattern of broad, dark lines and narrow, pale green lines around the eye.



Fig. 1.

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A related species, *Hypsilurus geelvinkianus*, which is very similar in size, colouration and also lacks a dorsal crest, possesses a "comparatively large gular pouch with acute base on the chest" : the absence of this feature and the hint of a "small gular flag with rounded base", reaffirms this specimen as *Hypsilurus modestus* (Manthey & Denzer, 2006).

Hypsilurus modestus is widely distributed on the island of New Guinea, adjacent smaller islands of Indonesia (including Kei and Aru Islands) and larger islands off the east of mainland Papua New Guinea (including New Britain and New Ireland). (Manthey & Denzer, 2006).

Locality records compiled for the island of New Guinea are mainly from the coastal lowlands (Manthey & Denzer, 2006). This record lies 185 km west of Yuro, Chimbu District, from where a specimen used in a phylogenetic study of the genus was acquired (Denzer & Manthey, 2016) : Yuro lies at a similar altitude (i.e. above 1000 metres elevation), to the record described here.



Fig. 2.

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References:

Denzer, W. & Manthey, U. (2016). Remarks on the taxonomy and nomenclature of the genus *Hypsilurus* Peters, 1867 (Reptilia, Agamidae, Amphibolurinae). *Zoosyst. Evol.* 92 (1) : 103-110.

Manthey, U., & Denzer, W. (2006). A revision of the Melanesian-Australian angle head lizards of the genus *Hypsilurus* (Sauria: Agamidae: Amphibolurinae), with description of four new species and one new subspecies. *Hamadryad.* 30: 1-40.