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Landestoy T., M. A., J. Torres López, and R. Powell. 2024. *Sphaerodactylus plummeri*

***Sphaerodactylus plummeri* Thomas and Hedges**

Barahona Big-scaled Geckolet

Sphaerodactylus altavelensis altavelensis: Powell et al. 1989:13. See Remarks.

Sphaerodactylus plummeri Thomas and Hedges 1992:289. Type locality, “10.6 km N Cabo Rojo on the Alcoa road (2.6 km N Pedernales-Oviedo road), Pedernales Province, Dominican Republic, elevation 80 m.” Holotype, an adult female, United States National Museum (USNM) 317892, one of a series collected by N. Plummer, S. B. Hedges, and R. Thomas on 28 July 1991 (not examined by authors).

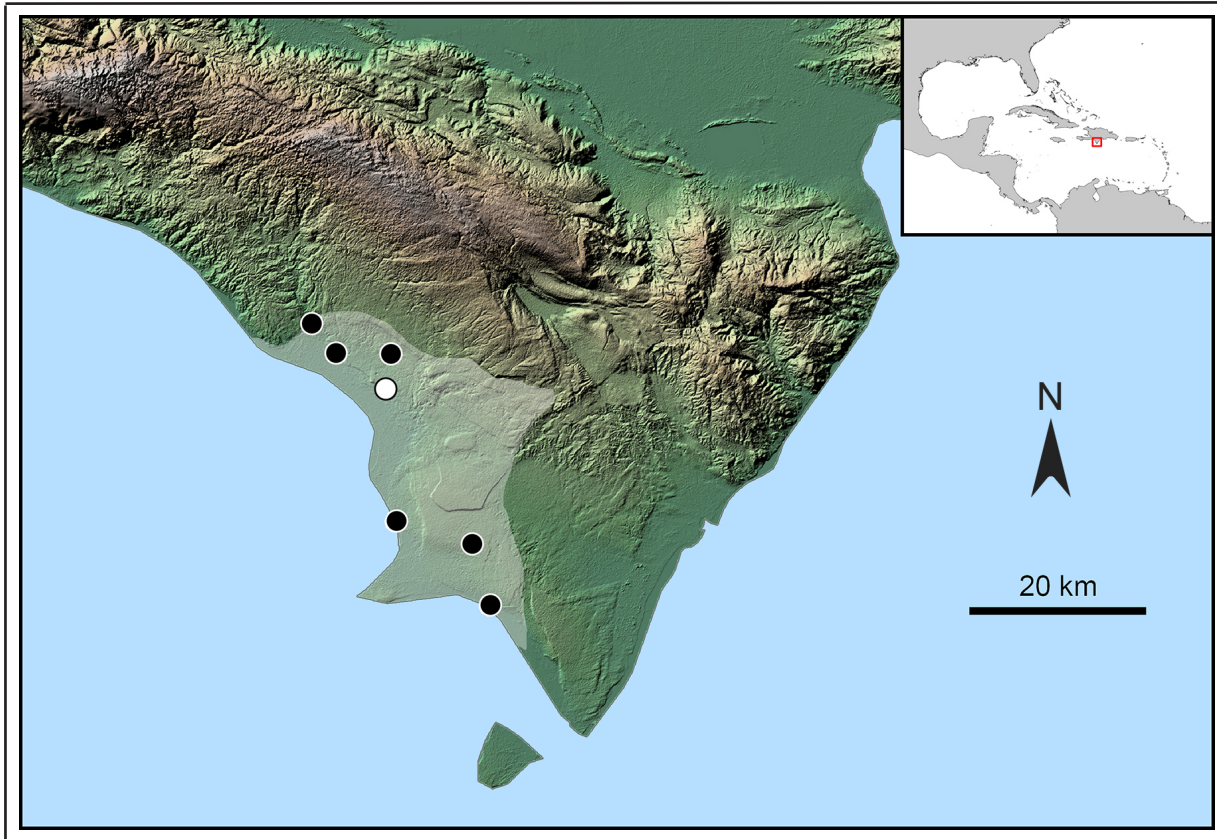
CONTENT. No subspecies are recognized.

DESCRIPTION. *Sphaerodactylus plummeri* is a small species (size of adults 18–22 mm SVL, mean = 20.1 + 0.52 [SE], n = 8; see also **Remarks**) with a short, acute snout; rostral broadly rounded (wider than long), with a semicircular depressed flat area set off by a

sharply-defined but low ridge before the peripheral declivity; median cleft extends to the ridge and the ridge extends onto the supranasals; one large, usually subpentagonal internasal, barely indenting the rostral, flanked by short, pentagonal but roughly triangular supranasals; upper postnasal short, oblong, oriented dorsoposteriorly; lower postnasal, small, granular; first upper labial roughly pentagonal, emarginate on anterior half of upper edge, high point about midway along scale; second and third upper labials (to mid-eye) are narrow rectangles; eyelid spine is well developed; pupils round to oval with narrow pale edges; mental subpentagonal (rounded anteriorly) with two large subpentagonal or subhexagonal postmentals followed by a short zone of large flat, smooth, cobblelike gulars quickly changing to smaller, more granular but imbricate scales on the throat; gulars between the ear openings number 22–38 (mean = 33.8 + 1.53, n = 10) become flattened and imbricate on the posterior portion of the throat; a few anterior gulars are weakly keeled, the rest smooth; the first lower labial is subrectangular, somewhat wider anteriorly, the second subtriangular, and the third small and narrow (roughly pentagonal); snout scales are large (broad, rounded, swollen), smooth (weak keels on upper snout), and slightly imbricate (scales between first



FIGURE 1. Adult male *Sphaerodactylus plummeri* from Paso Sena, 4 km N Pedernales, Pedernales Province, Dominican Republic. Photograph by Miguel A. Landestoy T.



MAP. The distribution of *Sphaerodactylus plummeri*; the white circle marks the type locality and the black circles indicate other known records. The shaded area represents an estimate of the distribution of the species.

interlabial sutures 7–10 (mean = $9.1 + 0.38$, $n = 10$); at least two enlarged snout scales usually present, most individuals with an enlarged scale behind the supranasal and upper postnasal on each side; snout scales become narrower between the eyes, more symmetrically granular but sloping upward on top of the head, more conical on the neck, flattening onto the trunk and becoming large, flat, imbricate, acute to slightly mucronate, and strongly keeled; no middorsal zone of granules or granular scales is present; dorsal scales from axilla to groin number 17–21 (mean = $18.1 + 0.46$, $n = 10$); dorsal scales reducing in size on the lower sides before the transition to ventral scales; pectoral and ventral scales smooth, flat, angled to rounded, ventral scales from axilla to groin number 22–24 (mean = $22.4 + 0.36$, $n = 10$); scales around midbody number 34–36 (mean = $35.1 + 0.31$, $n = 10$); unregenerated dorsal scales of the tail lie flat

and are acute, keeled, slightly swollen, imbricate, and verticillate; ventral caudal scales are larger, more rounded on the posterior edges, smooth and flat with the midventral row enlarged; the escutcheons are prominent and well developed with large central areas extending onto the posterior abdomen and with broad extensions well onto the thighs (6×15 – 20); toe pads are moderately expanded, wider than adjacent phalangeal segments; two toe-pad bracket scales; subdigital lamellae of the fourth digit number 9–11 (mean = $10.1 + 0.19$, $n = 10$); and 10–12 single hair-bearing scale organs along the free edges of dorsal scales (Thomas and Hedges 1992).

In life, ground color is brown to gray brown with dark brown to black markings; the basic pattern of females, juveniles, and immature males consists of a pair of narrow, pale upper postocular stripes on each side of head becoming indistinct on the body; a me-

dian pale stripe on the head ending at the occiput; minute postoccipital ocelli within each of the three dorsal-most stripes, the median one terminating, and each of the upper postocular stripes proceeding beyond the ocellus to another minute prescapular ocellus then continuing onto the trunk as indistinct dark-edged stripes with centers the same hue as the ground color; lower edges of the dorsolateral stripes more continuous and forming dark dorsal margins of midlateral stripes on each side; lower postocular stripes continue past the forelimbs as midlateral stripes; dark upper edges of the dorsolateral stripes cross the sacral region, where they are somewhat intensified; bridges of black pigment between the two stripes just past the sacrum include two tiny ocelli in-line with the stripes; both upper and lower stripes continue onto the tail; forelimbs with dark brown marbling; small elbow ocelli often present; hindlimbs with prominent knee ocelli, contrasting marbling, and prominent dark posterior thigh lines continuous with dark ventrolateral tail lines; throats patterned with a series of about three posteriorly curved dark lines converg-

ing from each side of jaw; some adult females have head patterns obscured by ontogenetic spotting and lines on the throat obscured by spotting; males with uniformly dull yellow heads in life, bodies with scattered flecking, lines weakly indicated or absent, throats without pattern or with only faint indications of lines, venters hazily stippled with pigment (Thomas and Hedges 1992).

DIAGNOSIS. The following combination of characters distinguishes *Sphaerodactylus plummeri* from Hispaniolan congeners known to occur on the Barahona Peninsula (Thomas and Hedges 1992) (see also **Remarks**): small body size (other sympatric species of *Sphaerodactylus* [*Sphaerodactylus armstrongi*, *Sphaerodactylus randi*, *Sphaerodactylus streptophorus streptophorus*, and *Sphaerodactylus thompsoni*] are larger); low dorsal and midbody scale counts (lowest of any Hispaniolan species); large snout scales (larger only in *Sphaerodactylus elasmorhynchus*); and two toe-pad bracket scales (all but one other species examined by Thomas and Hedges had three toe-pad bracket scales).



FIGURE 2. Dorsal (left) and ventral (right) images of the holotype of *Sphaerodactylus plummeri* (USNM 317892, adult female) (from SI 2023 and reproduced in GBIF 2022). Photographs by Jenna L. Welch, Division of Amphibians & Reptiles, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution. Used with permission.

PHYLOGENETIC RELATIONSHIPS. “Because of its unusual scalation, *S. plummeri* is not easily placed in any known species group of *Sphaerodactylus*. However, it shares some pattern features with species of the *difficilis* complex (e.g., the lineate dorsal head pattern), and therefore it might be placed, tentatively, in the large *notatus* group of the argus series (Hass 1991)” (Thomas and Hedges 1992:292). In a multilocus molecular phylogeny, *Sphaerodactylus plummeri* was placed in a southern Hispaniolan clade with *Sphaerodactylus armstrongi*, *Sphaerodactylus ariasae*, and *Sphaerodactylus streptophorus* (Daza et al. 2019; Scantlebury 2014). That clade in turn was nested within a clade of Puerto Rican species, suggesting that the occurrence of this group on Hispaniola “is best-explained by a single east-to-west dispersal from the Puerto Rican Bank and subsequent speciation” (Daza et al. 2019:176); the estimated time of divergence of that southern Hispaniolan clade was ~5.5 mya (4.12–6.99 mya).

CONSERVATION STATUS. This species is listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List due to its limited distribution (“extent of occurrence = 2,243 km²”) and because its populations are considered fragmented by ongoing threats from charcoal production and wood harvesting that continue to reduce the extent and quality of its habitat (Landestoy et al. 2016).

PUBLISHED DESCRIPTIONS. The only published description is the original by Thomas and Hedges (1992), much of which was reproduced by Uetz et al. (2023).

ILLUSTRATIONS. **Color photographs** were presented by Hedges (2023), Pinto et al. (2022, karyotype), Scantlebury (2014, male, female, and habitat; photographs reproduced in EOL 2023, iNaturalist 2023, and Wikipedia Contributors 2023, the first of which included an additional photograph of an adult [see also **Remarks**]), Scantlebury et al. (2011, which

also included the photograph of habitat that was in Scantlebury 2014), and SI (2023, dorsal and ventral views of the holotype; photographs reproduced in GBIF 2022). A **black-and-white photograph** was published by Thomas and Hedges (1992).

DISTRIBUTION. *Sphaerodactylus plummeri* is known only from the southwestern portion of the Barahona Peninsula at elevations from sea level to ~100 m asl, where it occurs in xerophytic habitats (dissected limestone and lowland plains) in association with dead agaves, other vegetation litter, and shallow root systems of bunch grasses (Powell et al. 1989; Thomas and Hedges 1992; S. B. Hedges, personal communication; see also **Comments**). Although Thomas and Hedges (1992) indicated that *Sphaerodactylus plummeri* and *Sphaerodactylus streptophorus* occurred syntopically, despite occurring within 13 m of one another in at least one locality, *Sphaerodactylus plummeri* occupies more exposed areas with agave and cacti, whereas *Sphaerodactylus streptophorus* occurs in largely shaded areas on slopes and in ravines and sinkholes with accumulations of leaf litter and other vegetative debris.

The distribution was mapped in EOL (2023), GBIF (2022, although the cited coordinates of the type locality are incorrect), Hedges (2023), iNaturalist (2023), Landestoy et al. (2016), and Wikipedia Contributors (2023).

FOSSIL RECORD. No fossils are known.

PERTINENT LITERATURE. In addition to the original description by Thomas and Hedges (1992), *Sphaerodactylus plummeri* was included in publications by Daza et al. (2019, systematics and biogeography [see also **Phylogenetic Relationships**]), Landestoy et al. (2016, conservation status), NCBI (2020, nucleotide and protein sequences), Pinto et al. (2022, haploid chromosome number $n = 17$), Powell et al. (1989, habitat, see also **Re-**



FIGURE 3. A fisheye view of typical habitat of *Sphaerodactylus plummeri* at the type locality (top), where *Sphaerodactylus thompsoni* can also be found (from Scantlebury et al. 2011); note the high percentage of exposed surfaces and xerophytic vegetation. A semi-open palm grove of *Pseudophoenix ekmanii* and *Coccolthrinax ekmanii*, habitat of *Sphaerodactylus plummeri* at Sabana de Algodón (bottom), a specific habitat of high conservation importance with those two endangered and geographically restricted species of palms and colonially nesting threatened Hispaniolan Parrots (*Amazona ventralis*). Photographs by Daniel P. Scantlebury (top) and Miguel A. Landestoy T. (bottom).

marks), Scantlebury (2014, possible Hispaniolan xeric forest ecomorph; see also **Phylogenetic Relationships**), and Scantlebury et al. (2011, activity period).

The species has been included in **general works, checklists, keys, faunal accounts, reports, or articles focusing on other species** (some of which include brief descriptions, illustrations, and notes on other topics): Bauer (2013), Bauer et al. (2021, species described

by Richard Thomas), Díaz-Lameiro et al. (2022, reference to the southern Hispaniolan clade [see **Phylogenetic Relationships**]), EOL (2023), fotolulu (2018, vernacular names), GBIF (2022), Geißler (2008), Hedges (2023), Hedges and Thomas (2001, comparison with *Sphaerodactylus ariasae*), Hedges et al. (2019, vernacular name), Henderson and Powell (2009, summary of natural history), Hill (2023), Hutchins et al. (2003), iNaturalist (2023), Kluge (1995 2001), Landestoy et al. (2021), Living National Treasures (2018), Meiri (2008, maximum snout-vent lengths of lizards), Meiri et al. (2018, lizard species with exceedingly small ranges), Midtgaard (2019), Powell (2012), Powell et al. (1999), Richardson (2023), Rodda (2020, listed as a diurnally active litter cryptozoid), Rösler (2000), Schmitz et al. (2001, new species described 1990–1999), Sistema Nacional Areas Protegidas (2015), Thomas and Hedges (1998, comparison with *Sphaerodactylus schuberti*), Uetz et al. (2023, checklist and summary of known information), Wikipedia Contributors (2023), and Wrobel (2004, vernacular name).

REMARKS. Lizards captured in 1986 were identified as *Sphaerodactylus altavelensis altavelensis* by Albert Schwartz (Powell et al. 1989); however, when we re-examined the

specimens (Bobby Witcher Memorial Collection, Avila University [BWMC 2684; n = 2], now University of Kansas Biodiversity Institute Herpetology Collection [KUH 315697]), they were clearly *Sphaerodactylus plummeri*. See also **Comments**.

A maximum SVL of 25 mm was listed by Rodda (2020).

The photograph of an adult female *Sphaerodactylus plummeri* published by Scantlebury (2014: figure 1.10) was instead a photograph of a specimen of *Sphaerodactylus streptophorus* (likely a male).

ETYMOLOGY. The specific name is a patronym honoring Nicholas Plummer, who helped collect the type series (Beolens et al. 2011; Thomas and Hedges 1992).

ADDITIONAL VERNACULAR NAMES. Barahona Big-scaled Sphaero (e.g., iNaturalist 2023; Landestoy et al. 2016; Wikipedia Contributors 2023; Wrobel 2004), Barahona Big-scaled Dwarf Gecko (Hill 2023), Plummer's Least Gecko (Richardson 2023), Barahona Big-scaled Least Gecko (fotolulu 2018). German: Plummer's Kugelfingergecko (fotolulu 2018; Midtgaard 2019), Gorssschuppiger Barahona-Kugelfingergecko (Midtgaard 2019). Danish: Storskællet Barahona-nymfegekko (Midtgaard 2019).

No local common name exists for this species, but all species of *Sphaerodactylus* typically are called "Salamanquejita," which is a diminutive for Salamanqueja or Salamanquesa, the name usually applied to house geckos (*Hemidactylus* spp.).

COMMENTS. Misidentification of individuals of species that have not yet been formally described is not uncommon, and misidentification of lizards now known to be *Sphaerodactylus plummeri* (see **Remarks**) is not unique. On 21 August 1984 and 26 June 1985, S. B. Hedges and R. Thomas collected specimens (SBH 102593–594, 160295–296) under

rocks, dead agaves, and clumps of grass 6.4 km southwest of Las Mercedes in Pedernales Province. These were initially identified as *Sphaerodactylus streptophorus* and the error was discovered recently using sequence data (S. B. Hedges, personal communication).

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