

Scientific note

On the maximum length of *Boa constrictor*

(Serpentes, Boidae)

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The South American *Boa constrictor* is among the most famous snakes, yet there is substantial uncertainty about its maximum length. Reproducible records based on voucher specimens or skins are very rare and individuals of more than 3.5 m total length are considered as rarity (Bellosa et al. 2007). A snake of 564 cm total length, killed on the Caribbean island of Trinidad during World War II, was often reported as the largest *Boa constrictor*, but was later found to be a misidentified Green Anaconda, *Eunectes murinus* (Boos 1992). Barker et al. (2012) suggested that “because of this mistaken identity, today there still is no well accepted record maximum length for *Boa constrictor* even though boas are common in many areas of their natural distribution and they are one of the most common snakes in captivity.” Lancini & Kornacker (1989: 86) mentioned a skin of *B. c. constrictor* of 545 cm length measured in a Brazilian institute (identified as Butantan Institute by Bonny 2007), but heavy fires in 2010 destroyed the collection and thus it appears unlikely that this skin is still extant. Bonny (2007: 170) presented a photograph of a *B. constrictor* skin from Cacao in French Guiana said to measure 495 cm length, but no data on the reliability of the measurements and the fate of the skin were provided.

Here we report on the length of a dried skin from the Zoologische Staatssammlung München (ZSM 4961/2012). It was obtained by Klaus Konrad Voß (1934–1991) in Brazil in the period 1962–1966 and kindly donated to the ZSM by Viktoria Mark-Voß and Rupert Voß. With a length of 445 cm (using a measuring tape and a levelling staff for measurements, Fig. 1) it is clearly

among the largest extant skins of *B. constrictor* and if we add an estimated 10 cm for the missing head, the snake might have reached ca. 455 cm total length. Due to the enormous size, the snake was most likely a female. With 94 dorsal scale rows at midbody, it is still in the range of the nominate subspecies (Bonny 2007).

The maximum size of many large snake species is poorly known and often obscured by exaggerations and unreproducible reports. Dried skins can serve as source for size data although artificially stretched snake skins can also lead to length overestimates (Bellosa et al. 2007). The dorsal scales along the vertebral column of ZSM 4961/2012 are slightly imbricate without any visible skin between the scales and without other recognizable hints that the skin might have been longitudinally stretched before drying.

References

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Fig. 1. Dried skin of *Boa constrictor* (ZSM 4961/2012) of 445 cm total length.

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