

## Armadillo Lizards and Sungazers: The Names Are Changed but the Lizards Remain the Same

Gary Fogel  
kordylus@juno.com

In 2011, science felt the need to tamper with the taxonomy of my two favorite lizard species, the armadillo lizards and the sungazers of South Africa. I've seen this happen with other species of lizards throughout the years, but really gave little thought to the process. After all, it never affected my articles or the labor-intensive signs I have carefully created for educational purposes. But now science has finally come knocking on my door with a classy name change to better describe and exemplify these two species. I was totally unaware of this change until this week, when it was brought to my attention. I thought this knowledge important enough to share it in this brief article, so we might all be brought up to speed, scientifically.

The armadillo lizard, previously known for decades as *Cordylus cataphractus*, is now *Ouroborus cataphractus*. This name

change better describes its unique behavior of grabbing its tail and curling up into a ball when threatened by danger, a behavior only noted in this particular lizard. A few examples of an ouroboros will immediately identify the similarities between the myth and the lizard itself. The sungazer lizard was *Cordylus giganteus*, but is now known as *Smaug giganteus*. This name change is a bit more whimsical, as Smaug is the dragon from the J.R.R. Tolkien book *The Hobbit*. Whoever made this suggestion certainly has a sense of humor. Included below are some visual examples of Smaug and the ouroboros to better understand the origins of just where these scholars and scientific dignitaries were trying to make their point.

For details on the new taxonomy for the family Cordylidae and a full phylogenetic tree, see Stanley et al. (2010).

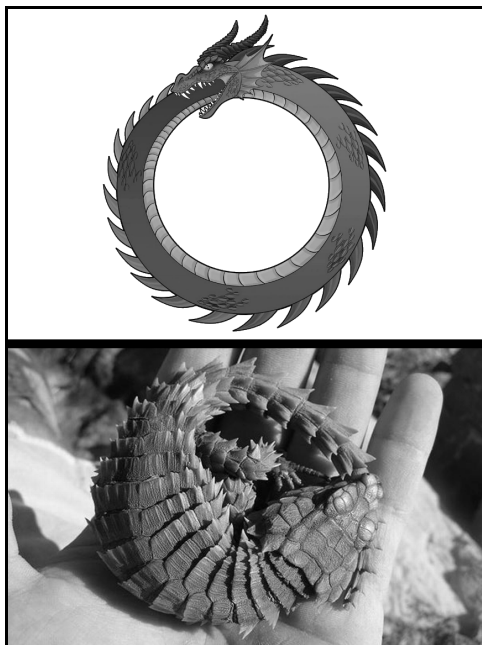
### Literature Cited

Stanley, E. L., A. M. Bauer, T. R. Jackman, W. R. Branch and P. Le F. N. Mouton. 2010. Between a rock and a hard polytomy: Rapid radiation in the rupicolous girdled lizards (Squamata: Cordylidae). *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* 58:53-70.

### Two of the Name Changes in the Family Cordylidae

*Cordylus cataphractus* is now *Ouroborus cataphractus*

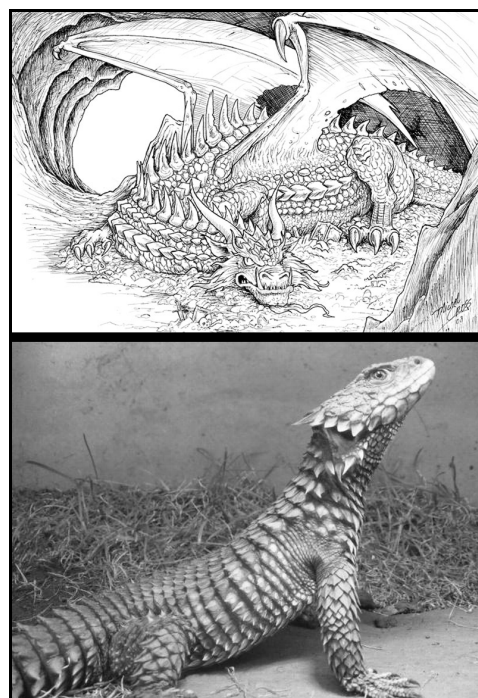
The ouroboros is an ancient symbol depicting a serpent or dragon with its own tail in its mouth. The name comes directly from the Greek οὐροβόρος, which means "devouring its tail." The ouroboros has been important in religious and mythological symbolism; it was used in ancient Egypt, Greece, India and Mexico. It was depicted in the 14th and 15th centuries of the Middle Ages, also 19th century Haiti. In Freemasonry, the ouroboros is displayed on numerous Masonic seals, frontispieces and other imagery, especially from the 18th century.



Above: the ouroboros. Below *Ouroborus cataphractus*.

*Cordylus giganteus* is now *Smaug giganteus*

Smaug, one of the last great dragons of Middle-earth, features in the novel *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien. Smaug's scaly hide is invulnerable, but his softer underside is more vulnerable to attack. Tolkien created numerous pencil sketches and two pieces of more detailed artwork portraying Smaug. The latter were detailed ink and watercolor sketches.



Above: Smaug. Below *Smaug giganteus*.