

Snake species named *Trimeresurus uetzi* after Reptile Database creator

November 3 2023, by Brian McNeill



The newly identified *Trimeresurus uetzi* is named after VCU professor Peter Uetzi, PhD., who created the Reptile Database. Credit: May thu Chit, contributed by Tan Nguyen

A newly identified species of green pit viper snake has been named in

honor of Virginia Commonwealth University professor Peter Uetz, Ph.D.

The snake species, found in central and southern Myanmar, was named *Trimeresurus uetzi*, or Uetz's pit viper, in honor of his creation of the [Reptile Database](#), a catalog of reptile species and classification that is relied upon by scientists and hobbyists around the world who study reptiles.

It is the second reptile species named after Uetz, an associate professor in the Center for Biological Data Science in VCU Life Sciences and an affiliate faculty member in the Department of Biology in the College of Humanities and Sciences. The first was in 2018 when scientists identified a chameleon found in northern Madagascar they named *Calumma uetzi*.

"I am obviously very humbled and honored by having a second species named after me. I did not expect that," Uetz said. "Usually, if you have one eponym (that is, a name based on a person), you think that's all the honor you may get or deserve, so it's really special."

The newly identified pit viper is similar to the species *Trimeresurus albolabris*, known as the white-lipped pit viper or white-lipped tree viper, and *Trimeresurus septentrionalis*, known as the Nepal pit viper or northern white-lipped pit viper.

But it differs by a series of series of morphological characters such as the presence of white pre- and post-ocular streaks in males, iris copper in males or green gold in females, more ventral plates and a much shorter hemipenis, according to the paper, "[A new green pitviper of the *Trimeresurus albolabris* complex \(Reptilia, Serpentes, Viperidae\) from central and southern Myanmar](#)," published in the journal *Zootaxa*.

The species was identified by scientists Gernot Vogel, Ph.D., of the Society for South East Asian Herpetology, Tan Van Nguyen of Duy Tan University in Vietnam and Patrick David of the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris. In their paper, they write that they named the snake after Uetz for "his invaluable help to herpetologists."

Vogel said the Reptile Database is, to him, "the most important site in herpetology."

"I use it several times every week. It is very up to date, and I wonder how this small team can manage that along with their normal work," he said.

Uetz founded the Reptile Database while working on his thesis project, which focused on proteins involved in vertebrate limb development, as a graduate student at the European Molecular Biology Laboratory in Heidelberg, Germany, in 1995.

Since then, the database has become an indispensable resource for those who study lizards, snakes, turtles, crocodiles and other reptiles. As of October, the database includes information on 12,060 species.

"His countless hours of work made the base for the research of hundreds of herpetologists as well as private people," Vogel said of Uetz. "I am not telling lies when I emphasize that there are no other sources to get this data easily. The site is growing and improving continuously.

"We need people like Peter to investigate the biodiversity of our planet," Vogel added. "We can only protect what we know, and the describing of so-far unnamed species needs sources like this database. So indirectly, Peter Uetz [contributed to] the description of more new [reptile species](#) as any taxonomic researcher in the world."

More information: Gernot Vogel et al, A new green pitviper of the *Trimeresurus albolabris* complex (Reptilia, Serpentes, Viperidae) from central and southern Myanmar, *Zootaxa* (2023). [DOI: 10.11646/zootaxa.5357.4.3](https://doi.org/10.11646/zootaxa.5357.4.3)

Provided by Virginia Commonwealth University

Citation: Snake species named *Trimeresurus uetzi* after Reptile Database creator (2023, November 3) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-11-snake-species-trimeresurus-uetzi-reptile.html>

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