Aussie snakes slither into species book

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A deadly Australian eastern brown snake is photographed in Sydney, Australia on September 25, 2012. Scientists have added dozens of Australian species to a family of small worm-like snakes called Scolecophidia, which are some of the least-understood creatures on Earth.

Scientists have added dozens of Australian species to the family of small worm-like snakes called *Scolecophidia*, which are some of the least-understood creatures on Earth.

Researchers from France, Australia and the United States analysed the genomes of 741 animals from 27 recognised species in a subgroup known as Australian blind snakes.

The data suggest the number of species is "at least two times the current number of recognised, nominal species," said a summary of the results, published in the Biological Journal of the Linnean Society.

Snakes are divided into two major groups: Scolecophidia, which are generally less than 30 centimetres (12 inches) long, and the more common Alethinophidia, which include boas, pythons, cobras and vipers.

There were previously 3,432 recognised species, according to a joint statement by France's CNRS national research centre and National Museum of Natural History.

Of these, there were 402 known species of Scolecophidia. But the new findings suggest the sub-group of blind snakes alone may have between 29 and 65 hitherto unknown types.

"If this pattern were to repeat on a global scale, it would mean that the number of recognised Scolecophidia species is between 830 and 1,370 species instead of the current 402," said the statement.

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