

**PHYLOGENETIC RELATIONSHIPS AND PHYLOGEOGRAPHY OF
ABLEPHARUS KITAIBELII (SAURIA: SCINCIDAE) SPECIES COMPLEX
IN EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN**

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Sequence data derived from two mitochondrial markers, 16 S rRNA and cyt b, were used to infer the phylogenetic relationships within the snake-eyed skinks of the *Ablepharus kitaibelii* species complex (*A. kitaibelii*, *A. budaki*, *A. chernovi*, *A. rueppellii*) from eastern Mediterranean. The trees produced by Maximum Likelihood (ML) and Bayesian Inference (BI) support the monophyly of *A. kitaibelii* and *A. chernovi* while the case of *A. budaki* turned out to be more complicated. Even though the topology confirms the recently raised species status within the complex, the polyphyly of *A. budaki* suggests the necessity for taxonomic revision. The addition of five samples of *A. pannonicus* from Iran produced a topology that indicates the integration of this species in the same complex. Estimation of divergence times showed that several dispersal and vicarianistic events and perhaps climatic changes in the late Neogene and Quaternary have played a key role on the evolutionary and biogeographical history of the *A. kitaibelii* species complex.