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First insight into the diversity of snakes in the Pleistocene of Cuba

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The herpetofaunal biodiversity of West Indies suffered a significant change during the last few million years that is well documented for some squamate reptilies (lizards). However, almost nothing is known about past biodiversity of snakes, which are active predators and important component of terrestrial ecosystems. Here we describe the fossil remains of snakes (Reptilia: Serpentes) from the late Pleistocene of El Abrón Cave, Cuba. This is the first representative assemblage of fossil snakes from Cuba. It allows us to evaluate the taxonomic diversity of snakes in the Pleistocene of the island for the first time. The material includes eight taxa from the four snake families: cf. *Cubatyphlops* (Typhlopidae), *Tropidophis melanurus, Tropidophis* sp., *Cubophis* cf. *cantherigerus, Arrhyton* sp., cf. *Caraiba andreae*, Dipsadidae indet., and Natricidae indet. (Natricidae). Two (Dipsadidae indet. and Natricidae indet.) are not known in the modern fauna of Cuba. The assemblage from El Abrón Cave shows that ophidian Pleistocene assemblage was different from modern snake fauna of Cuba and was probably more diverse at genus level than it is now. Most of taxa revealed in El Abrón Cave were not previously known in the fossil record.

Key words: Reptilia, Serpentes, insular biodiversity, extinction, Pleistocene, Cuba.

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