Project Update: October 2021

The Extinct or Shy project is about finding two data-deficient fossorial skinks (*Scolecoseps boulengeri* and *Proscelotes aenea*) that have not been recorded in Lumbo, northern Mozambique since 1918.

The only other place where they were seen was in Pemba, northern Mozambique once, in 1948. But I conducted a study in Pemba (accepted today by coincidence) where we collated almost 20 years of collections of reptiles and there were no records of any of the species there. Probably due to the recent urbanisation of the city of Pemba.

The other interesting facts are that in Pemba (in 1948) Joaquim R. dos Santos Júnior collected six individuals of one of the species (*Scolecoseps boulengeri*) and three of the other (*Proscelotes aenea*) in only 2 nights!

In Lumbo, Arthur Loveridge spent 2 months and collected seven individuals of *Scolecoseps boulengeri* and six *Proscelotes aenea*. None of them used traps. So, I believe we are facing a steep decline in abundance of the species.

One big challenge we had was that none of the above authors described where they collected the specimens. There are no coordinates or information on the specifics of the habitat. So, we had to "plant" traps all over Lumbo in different habitats to finally find it.

Meanwhile we have been using traps for over 6 months now and only collected three individuals of *Proscelotes aenea* but no *Scolecoseps boulengeri* so far.

It is possible that that *Scolecoseps boulengeri* is in fact extinct and that *Proscelotes aenea* is in decline in Lumbo, probably due to the urbanisation of the area.

We are now trying to access how healthy is the population of *P. aenea* in Lumbo and still trying to find *S. boulengeri*.

The next steps after this project will be to survey the less urbanised areas of the coastline between Lumbo and Pemba using the information we learned from their habitat in Lumbo and see if they occur there. This will have huge implications for the delineation of the Key Biodiversity Area that due to this project can now be delineated to encompass Lumbo once we re-assess the species conservation status.