The genus *Echis* Merrem, 1820, is one of the most taxonomically complex genera of snakes in Africa. Recent genetic analysis has shown that the genetic variability among the *Echis leucogaster* and *Echis pyramidum* group is very low, which made some authors suggest the existence of just a single species comprised of several subspecies (Arnold, Robinson & Carranza, 2009; Pook et al., 2009). Within Morocco, *Echis leucogaster* (or *Echis pyramidum leucogaster*) is probably the rarest snake (Aymerich, Borof-Aymerich and Geniez, 2004). Bons and Geniez (1996) mentioned only two locations; Aouinet Torkoz (now called Aouinet Lahna) and Ait-Semgane-n-el-Grara (originally attributed to *Echis carinatus* by Sochurek but later classified as *Dasypeltis scabra* by Stemmler, 1971). Over the years, the occurrence of *E. leucogaster* on both localities has been confirmed. The population in Aouinet Lahna is relatively abundant (Aymerich, Borof-Aymerich and Geniez, 2004; K. Lazghem, pers. comm.; G. Martinez del Marmol Marin, pers. obs.). Additionally, *E. leucogaster* has been found in nearby regions such as Tigit (Herrmann, Herrmann and Geniez, 2000). South of Ouarzazate, the number of citations has also increased with up to six specimens found in 2009 in the area between Ait Semgane-n-el-Grara and Tasla (Escoriza et al., 2009; M. Aymerich, pers. comm.) and other nearby points such as Amazer (Aymerich, Borof-Aymerich and Geniez, 2004) and Allougoum (Pook et al., 2009). However, the possibility that both populations were connected was considered to be unlikely due to the large gap of more than 300 km separating these (e.g. Escoriza et al., 2009).

During a herpetological trip to Morocco on April 30th, 2012, the authors found a *E. leucogaster* (Fig. 1A,B) in an oasis close to the river Tata, on the outskirts of the town of Tata (Lat. 29.70, Long. -7.99). The individual was active at dusk (at 21:05) in an irrigation canal between crops (Fig. 1C). The habitat is similar to that of other locations where *E. leucogaster* has been found; irrigation canals in agricultural fields which form oases when located in Acacia fields (*Acacia tortilis raddiana* Brenan, 1983 (Fig. 1D). Here, individuals can find prey, refuge and moisture. The importance of this record is that it shows that the distribution of *E. leucogaster* in Morocco is not limited to the two historical locations. This report shows that *E. leucogaster* has a potential much wider distribution than that previously thought, and suggests the existence of a continuous population. Despite being characterized as a shy and elusive species, *E. leucogaster* has been often found in or around oases in Morocco, where usually also a large concentration of people occur. Therefore, the possibility of accidental bites is relatively high. Although the only known case in Morocco had no serious consequences (K. Lazghem, pers. comm.) and the chemistry of the venom can vary greatly among different populations (Gillisen et al., 1994), in other parts of Africa the bite of this species is sometimes lethal to humans. As an example, *E. leucogaster* is the snake species which kills most people in Mali, and one of the snakes responsible for the most snake bite fatalities in Burkina Faso (WHO Regional Office for Africa, 2010). It is therefore highly important to document the actual distribution of *E. leucogaster* in Morocco, so that authorities can ensure the supply of potential antidotes which offer appropriate treatment. The same situation holds true for other snake species with venom dangerous to humans in the study area, such as *Cerastes cerastes*, *C. vipera*, *Daboia mauritanica*, *Bitis arietans* and *Naja haje* (Aymerich, Borof-Aymerich and Geniez, 2004).
Figure 1. (A) Photograph of the *Echis leucogaster* individual found in Tata; (B) same individual: ventral view; (C) the habitat where the individual was found; (D) the surrounding oasis habitat.

Figure 2. Map showing the known distribution of *Echis leucogaster* in Morocco. Indicated as red dots known locations (according to Aymerich, Borof-Aymerich and Geniez, 2004; Escoriza et al., 2009; Pook et al., 2009; Aymerich, pers. comm.). The new locality described in this paper is marked with a star.
New record of *Echis leucogaster*

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**References**


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