



A new species of the genus *Lycodon* (Squamata, Colubridae) from Sichuan Province, China

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Abstract

A new species of genus *Lycodon* Boie, 1826 (Squamata: Colubridae) is described from Sichuan Province, China on the basis of three specimens. The new species, *Lycodon liuchengchaoi* **sp. nov.**, is superficially similar to *L. fasciatus* and *L. ruhstrati* but can be distinguished from them by its divided anal plate and the large number and yellow colour of the rings around the body. A new key to the *Lycodon* of China is presented.

Key words: herpetology, *Lycodon liuchengchaoi*, new species, Reptilia, Serpentes, taxonomy

Introduction

The genus *Lycodon* Boie, 1826, is one of the most widespread snake genera occurring in western, southern, eastern and southeastern Asia, especially in the tropical and subtropical regions. It currently includes about 30 species (Vogel *et al.*, 2009). This genus is mainly characterized by: (1) an arched maxillary bone bent inwards anteriorly; (2) 3–6 anterior fang-like teeth increasing in size and separated by a toothless interspace from 7–15 posterior teeth, the last 2–3 of which are larger than the others; (3) a vertically elliptical pupil; and (4) smooth or feebly keeled scales, forming 15–19 rows at midbody (Lanza, 1999). Until 2008 five species were reported for China with none of them endemic to this country. These were *Lycodon capucinus*, *L. fasciatus*, *L. laoensis*, *L. ruhstrati* and *L. subcinctus* (Zhao, 2006; Zhao & Adler, 1993; Zhao *et al.*, 1998). Recently, *Lycodon futsingensis* (Pope, 1928), which was once subsequently synonymized with *L. ruhstrati* by Pope himself (Pope, 1935) was revalidated by Vogel *et al.* (2009). In 2010 and 2011, two new, endemic species were described from China: *Lycodon synaptor* (Vogel & David, 2010) and *Lycodon gongshan* (Vogel & Luo, 2011).

While examining the specimens collected from northern Sichuan Province, China, we found two specimens from Tangjiahe National Nature Reserve, Qingchuan County that could not be assigned to any known species. They are similar to *L. fasciatus* in shape and were identified as *L. fasciatus* previously. By careful examination of the specimens it was noticed that they can be distinguished from *L. fasciatus* by several morphological characters. A third specimen originating from Monping County, Sichuan Province was discovered in the collection of the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, USA (FMNH). It matched the two specimens except in having 8 instead of 7 upper labials. We therefore suggest that these specimens from Qingchuan and Monping counties should be regarded as a new species.

Material and methods

The two recently collected specimens of the new species were preserved in 5% formalin and deposited in the