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A new species of Kukri Snake (*Oligodon* Fitzinger, 1826; Squamata: Colubridae) from the Cat Tien National Park, southern Vietnam

ANNA B. VASSILIEVA[1,2,6], PETER GEISSLER[5,6], EDUARD A. GALOYAN[2,3], NIKOLAY A. POYARKOV Jr[1,2], ROBERT WAYNE VAN DEVENDER[4] & WOLFGANG BÖHME[5]

[1]*Department of Vertebrate Zoology, Biological Faculty, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Leninskiye Gory, GSP–1, Moscow 119991, Russia*
[2]*Joint Russian–Vietnamese Tropical Research and Technological Center of the A.N. Severtsov Institute of Ecology and Evolution, South Branch, 3, Street 3/2, 10 District, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*
[3]*Zoological Museum, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Bolshaya Nikitskaya st. 6., Moscow 125009, Russia*
[4]*Department of Biology, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608, USA*
[5]*Zoologisches Forschungsmuseum Alexander Koenig, Adenauerallee 160, 53113 Bonn, Germany. E-mail: pgeissler84@yahoo.de*
[6]*Corresponding authors. E-mail: pgeissler84@yahoo.de; vassil.anna@gmail.com*

Abstract

We describe a new species of the genus *Oligodon* from the lowland forests of Cat Tien National Park, Dong Nai Province, in southern Vietnam. *Oligodon cattienensis* **sp. nov.** is distinguished from the remaining Southeast Asian kukri snakes by the combination of the following characters: medium-sized, deeply forked hemipenes without spines, 17-17-15 dorsal scale rows, nasal entire, 2 small postoculars, almost equal in size, 167–178 ventrals, 31–35 subcaudals, 24–35 + 5 large dark-edged vertebral blotches in combination with a yellow-orange or red vertebral stripe between blotches, head pattern including ocular band, temporal bands and elongated chevron, ventrals pink or whitish (reddish in juveniles) in life, some bearing a quadrangular dark blotch on each lateral side, or ventrals being entirely dark. Based on the hemipenial morphology the new species is assigned to the *Oligodon cyclurus* species group. A comparison table for all Indochinese *Oligodon* is provided.

Key words: *Oligodon cattienensis* **sp. nov.**, Dong Nai Province, southern Indochina, taxonomy, natural history

Introduction

Being one of the most speciose snake genera in South and Southeast Asia, *Oligodon* Fitzinger, 1826 currently comprises 74 described, valid taxa (Green 2010, Green *et al.* 2010, David & Vogel 2012, David *et al.* 2011, 2012, Neang *et al.* 2012). Beside the distinctly enlarged rostral scale, the most prominent and eponymous character are the enlarged, broad and recurved kukri-shaped hind teeth. They are interpreted as an evolutionary adaptation to oophagy (Coleman *et al.* 1993). Unlike the situation in other oophagous snakes, the kukri teeth allow these snakes to feed on eggs too large to swallow, by sawing a hole into the egg-shell (Minton & Anderson 1963). Indochina, including Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, currently houses 21 known species (see table 1), and therefore forms a center of species richness for this genus (David *et al.* 2012). The taxonomy and systematics of *Oligodon* has been under discussion for about 70 years, since Smith (1943) made the first attempt to characterize species groups reflecting phylogenetic units. Smith used hemipenial traits to diagnose seven species groups, of which four occur in Indochina (Smith 1943, David *et al.* 2008 a & b, David *et al.* 2012, Neang *et al.* 2012): *Oligodon cinereus*—group (*O. cinereus, O. albocinctus, O. inornatus, O. joynsoni,* and *O. nagao*); *Oligodon cyclurus*—group (*O. formosanus, O. ocellatus, O. fasciolatus, O. kampucheaensis, O. saintgironsi* and *O. macrurus*); *Oligodon taeniatus*—group (*O. deuvei, O. moricei, O. taeniatus, O. mouhoti* and *O. barroni*); *Oligodon dorsalis*—group (*O. lacroixi, O. eberhardti* and *O. catenatus*). These suspected species groups were mostly supported by modern phylogenetic approaches (Green *et al.* 2010). Currently only one species, *Oligodon annamensis* Leviton, 1953 is not clearly assignable to

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