A new species of the genus *Opisthotropis* Günther, 1872 (Squamata: Natricidae) from the highlands of Kon Tum Province, Vietnam

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Abstract

A new species of the snake genus *Opisthotropis* Günther, 1872, *Opisthotropis cucae* sp. nov., is described from Kon Tum Plateau in central Vietnam. It is distinguished from any other *Opisthotropis* species by the combination of the following characters: (1) dorsal scales entirely smooth, in 23–19–19 rows; (2) 191 ventrals; (3) 1 loreal, in contact with internasal; (4) 7 supralabials, 5th entering orbit; (4) dorsum uniformly greyish-brown without bands or crossbars, with an irregular separation between dark dorsum and venter, greyish-yellow speckled with dark grey. An extended comparison with other species of the genus *Opisthotropis* species is provided together with a key to the known species of the genus. *Opisthotropis cucae* sp. nov. is the third new mountain stream snake described from Vietnam in the past decade. The grammatical gender of the genus *Opisthotropis* is discussed; this genus is feminine.

Key words: Natricidae, *Opisthotropis cucae* sp. nov., snake, taxonomy, Vietnam

Introduction

The natricid snake genus *Opisthotropis* Günther, 1872 currently contains 19 nominal species (Ziegler et al. 2008; this work, see below). These highly aquatic snakes inhabit mostly flowing streams of hills and mountains of tropical Asia. On the basis of Ziegler et al. (2008), six species are currently recorded from Vietnam: *O. andersonii* (Boulenger, 1888), *O. balteata* (Cope, 1895), *O. jacobi* Angel & Bourret, 1933, *O. lateralis* Boulenger, 1903, and *O. tamdaoensis* Ziegler, David & Vu, 2008, all inhabiting northern and central Vietnam, and *O. daovantieni* Orlov, Darevsky & Murphy, 1998, known from southern central Vietnam.

Boulenger (1893) and Smith (1943) defined the genus *Opisthotropis* Günther, 1872 by a series of characters that were detailed in Ziegler et al. (2008) and will not be repeated here. The most important of these characters for separating the genus *Opisthotropis* from other Asian genera of the family Natricidae are combined as follows: (1) head depressed, not or scarcely distinct from neck; (2) eye moderate or small, with rounded or vertically elliptical pupil; (3) nostril in the nasal, placed in dorsal position on the snout, directed upwards and outwards; (4) prefrontal very broad, usually single; (5) scales smooth or keeled, without apical pits, in 15 to 19 dorsal rows at midbody; (6) cloacal scale divided; and (7) upper maxillary teeth 20–40, small, subequal.

Some nomenclatural and taxonomic issues concerning *Opisthotropis* were discussed by Ziegler et al. (2008). Subsequently, Murphy et al. (2008) showed that the genus *Paratapinophis* Angel, 1929 is valid. *Paratapinophis praemaxillaris* Angel, 1929, long referred to the genus *Opisthotropis* since Pope (1935), is thus removed from the list of species of this latter genus. The status of the genus *Parahelicops* Bourret, 1934 (type species: *Parahelicops annamensis* Bourret, 1934 by monotypy), either considered valid (e.g., Taylor & Elbel 1958; Stuart 2006) or a synonym of *Opisthotropis* (Smith 1943), will be discussed elsewhere.

In 2009, a specimen of the genus *Opisthotropis* was collected from Kon Tum Plateau, Kon Tum Province, in southern central Vietnam. This specimen can be referred to this genus on the basis of its dentition, head scalation.