



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; (5) 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