

On some taxonomic and nomenclatural problems in Indian species of the genus *Oligodon* Fitzinger, 1826 (Squamata: Colubridae)

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Abstract

This paper deals with three nomenclatural and taxonomic problems affecting two species groups of the colubrid snake genus *Oligodon* Fitzinger, 1826: (i) A neotype is formally designated for *Coronella cyclura* Cantor, 1839, associating this specific nomen with populations from India, Bangladesh and Myanmar with 19 scale rows at midbody; (ii) *Oligodon kheriensis* Acharji & Ray, 1936 is shown to be a valid species of the *Oligodon cyclurus* group occurring in northern India and Nepal; (iii) The type-locality of *Simotes multifasciatus* Jan & Sordelli, 1865 is shown to be Sultanpur, India. This taxon is considered a synonym of *Oligodon cinereus* (Günther, 1864). The range of this species in India is extended. The status of specimens of *Oligodon cinereus* from India and Myanmar is briefly discussed. Specimens from Thailand identified as *Oligodon cinereus multifasciatus* and *Oligodon cinereus swinhonis* (Günther, 1864) are referred to *Oligodon joynsoni* (Smith, 1917). India is home to at least 21 species of the genus *Oligodon*, an updated list of which is provided.

Key words: India, neotype, *Oligodon cinereus*, *Oligodon cyclurus*, *Oligodon kheriensis*, *Oligodon joynsoni*, *Simotes multifasciatus*, taxonomy, Thailand

Introduction

The genus *Oligodon* Fitzinger, 1826, widespread throughout central and tropical Asia, contains about 70 valid species (Green *et al.* 2010). The taxonomy of this genus, especially its contents, remains unclear, as a result of high lineage diversity, small samples for the majority of species, and continued poor sampling within the range known to be occupied by the snakes of this genus. Several species have been described in recent years (e.g., David *et al.* 2008a, b), whereas others have been placed in synonymy (Tillack & Günther 2010). In the present paper, we address one nomenclatural and two taxonomic problems affecting species of this genus present in India. These taxa belong to the *Oligodon cyclurus* group and *Oligodon cinereus* group.

Smith (1943), Wagner (1975) and Green *et al.* (2010) recognized several informal species groups, mostly on the basis of hemipenial morphology. The *Oligodon cyclurus* group currently includes *O. cyclurus* (Cantor, 1839), *O. fasciolatus* (Günther, 1864), *O. juglandifer* (Wall, 1909), *O. chinensis* (Günther, 1888), *O. formosanus* (Günther, 1872), *O. ocellatus* (Morice, 1875), *O. saintgironsi* David, Vogel & Pauwels, 2008, and *O. macrurus* (Angel, 1927). This group, which contains large-growing species, is characterized by (1) long and deeply forked hemipenes, neither spinose nor papillate (with the exception of *O. formosanus*, in which papillae are present), (2) 17–23 dorsal scale rows, (3) 9–13 maxillary teeth, (4) complete complement of head scales, including a loreal (sometimes absent in *O. macrurus*) and often a presubocular, (5) anal plate entire; and (6) blotched and/or reticulated colour pattern, although a striped pattern may be found in some specimens of *Oligodon cyclurus*. These species are widespread from north-eastern India and Myanmar, to southern China and to southern Thailand.

In the present paper, we discuss the problem of the name bearing type of *Coronella cyclura* Cantor, 1839, which has been controversial (see Das 2004). The lack of a name-bearing type for this species has been one of the causes for its uncertain taxonomy. A formal designation of a neotype is performed. We also address the status of