A new species of insular pitviper of the genus Cryptelytrops (Squamata: Viperidae) from southern Vietnam

L. LEE GRISMER¹, NGO VAN TRI² & JESSE L. GRISMER³

¹Department of Biology, La Sierra University, Riverside California 92515-8247 USA. E-mail: lgrismer@lasierra.edu
²Department of Environmental Management and Technology, Institute of Tropical Biology, 85 Tran Quoc Toan Street, District 3, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. E-mail: trigeckonid@hotmail.com
³Department of Biology, Villanova University, 800 Lancaster Avenue, Villanova, Pennsylvania 19085 USA. E-mail: jesse.grismer@villanova.edu

Abstract

We describe a new species of pitviper Cryptelytrops honsonensis sp. nov. from Hon Son Island in Rach Gia Bay, Kien Giang Province of southern Vietnam based on it having unique aspects of scation, body proportions, and color pattern. It is similar to C. venustus in morphology and color pattern and the putative close relationship between these species would corroborate a biogeographical link across southern Indochina seen in a number of other taxa. The presence of this newly discovered insular endemic in Rach Gia Bay and other insular endemics of Rach Gia Bay addressed herein, underscores the understudied nature of these islands and the need for their continued conservation.

Key words: Cryptelytrops honsonensis, C. venustus, Hon Son, Rach Gia Bay, Vietnam, Indochina

Introduction

Pitvipers of the genus Trimeresurus sensu lato are generally nocturnal, terrestrial or arboreal species that inhabit a wide variety of environments ranging from meadows to plantations, open bushy areas and, secondary lowland forests to primary cloud forests (Malkmus et al. 2002; Vogel 2006). It is the largest group of Asian pitvipers and its 45 or so species collectively range from northern India in the west, eastward through the majority of East Asia to Taiwan and the Ryukyu Archipelago, Japan; and southward through the Philippines, Thailand, West Malaysia, Borneo, and the other major islands of the Sunda Shelf (Sumatra, Java, Sulawesi and some smaller islands extending east to Pulau Kisar; Gumprecht et al. 2004; Malkmus et al. 2002; Manthey & Grossmann 1997; Vogel 2006).

In a combined molecular and morphological phylogeny, Malhotra & Thorpe (2004a) found the monophyletic Trimeresurus sensu lato to contain five major clades which they assigned to eight genera. One of these genera, Cryptelytrops, contains at least 12 species that collectively range from northern India, Bangladesh and the Andaman and Nicobar islands, across Indochina through southern China, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. From here the group extends southward through the Malay Peninsula to Sumatra and eastward across Wallace’s Line through many of the Lesser Sunda islands to as far Pulau Kisar (Gumprecht et al. 2004). Orlov et al. (2003) reported Trimeresurus cf. kanburiensis from central Vietnam. Their recognition of this species as T. kanburiensis would place it in the genus Cryptelytrops (sensu Malhotra & Thorpe 2004a). Later, Orlov et al. (2004) described this population as the new species, T. truongsonensis, concluding that it could not be aligned with any of the genera constructed by Malhotra & Thorpe (2004a). In contradiction to this conclusion, however they noted character state similarities, including the derived condition of the Type 1