



A new species of the genus *Lycodon* (Boie, 1826) from the southwestern mountains of China (Squamata: Colubridae)

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Abstract

A new species of the genus *Lycodon* from the Gaoligong Mountains, Yunnan, China is described, *Lycodon gongshan* sp. nov. This species is similar to *L. fasciatus*, but differs in its longer tail, especially in males, and larger number of subcaudals, especially in females. The number of ventrals and maximum body size is greater in both sexes of the new species. From the *Lycodon ruhstrati* group, the new species differs in the colour of the belly and the dorsal bands. This new species seems to be endemic to Yunnan Province, People's Republic of China. The holotype of *Ophites fasciatus* Anderson, 1879 appears to have been lost, so a neotype is designated in order to address the status of this taxon.

Key words: *Lycodon fasciatus*, *Lycodon gongshan* spec. nov., neotype, Oriental Region, taxonomy

Introduction

Snakes of the *Lycodon fasciatus* (Anderson, 1879) and *Lycodon ruhstrati* (Fischer, 1886) groups have drawn some attention in recent years. While these two taxa were often confused in the past, the *Lycodon ruhstrati* complex was recently reviewed (Vogel & Brachtel 2008; Vogel *et al.* 2009) and it has been shown to be a composite of species. Two of these, *Lycodon ruhstrati abditus* Vogel *et al.*, 2009 and *Lycodon futsingensis* (Pope, 1928), occur in China, in particular in Yunnan Province. Another new species, similar to these groups, was recently described as *Lycodon synaptor* Vogel & David, 2010 from Dongchuan District in Yunnan Province, China. While gathering more data on the *Lycodon fasciatus* group, we came upon four individuals that obviously belonged to another new Chinese species, which we describe herein.

For a long time, *L. fasciatus* has been considered to be a wide ranging, and variable species. John Anderson (1879) described *Ophites fasciatus* from a specimen he received during his two expeditions to Western Yunnan in 1866 and 1875. The specimen was collected at Ponsee (today Bangxi in Yingjiang County, Yunnan). The description was quite detailed for that time, but he did not mention the sex of the specimen. Since 1865, Anderson had worked as a curator of the Indian Museum in Calcutta and he held this position until 1886 (Alcock 1902), so many of the specimens, including many type specimens, collected during these two expeditions are still in the collection of the ZSI in Kolkata (Das *et al.* 1992). However, neither the senior author, who visited this collection in 2008, nor I. Das who examined all type specimens there (Das 1998), could locate the holotype of *Ophites fasciatus* in the collection of the ZSI. This specimen was most likely lost during the flooding of the Ganga during World War II (Das *in litt.* July, 2010). Given that "*Lycodon fasciatus*" auctorum has been shown to be a composite of closely related species, we herein designate a neotype for *Ophites fasciatus* Anderson, 1879.