



A new species of the genus *Oligodon* Fitzinger, 1826 (Squamata: Colubridae) from coastal southern Vietnam

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Abstract

A new species of the genus *Oligodon* from the coastal area of Binh Chau–Phuoc Buu Nature Reserve, Ba Ria–Vung Tau Province, southern Vietnam, is described. *Oligodon arenarius* sp. nov. is distinguishable from all other species by the unique combination of the following characters: medium size; 17 dorsal scale rows; 6–8 maxillary teeth, the posterior three being enlarged; head scalation lacking a loreal but usually including a presubocular; divided nasal; two postoculars; 131–144 ventrals; 36–60 subcaudals; unforked hemipenis, without spines or obvious papillae; sexual dimorphism displayed in the number of subcaudals (36–40 in females, 58–60 in males) and a relative tail length, tails being quite long in males (TaL/TL = 0.26–0.28) and moderate in females (TaL/TL = 0.13–0.17); head coloration pattern including ocular band, temporal bands and chevron-shaped mark on nape; dorsal coloration without distinct pattern, uniform or with dark speckling; ventrals pinkish in life, immaculate. To date, this species appear to be endemic to Vietnam.

Key words: *Oligodon arenarius* sp. nov., Ba Ria-Vung Tau Province, southern Indochina, taxonomy, sexual dimorphism, natural history

Introduction

The kukri snakes, or the colubrid snakes of the genus *Oligodon* Fitzinger, 1826, which currently numbers 74 valid species (Uetz & Jiri Hošek, 2015), have a wide distribution throughout tropical and subtropical Asia, including the Sunda Islands and the Philippines. In all, 22 species of the genus occur in Indochina, 19 of which are known from Vietnam (David *et al.* 2008ab, Nguyen *et al.* 2009, Das 2010, Green 2010, Neang *et al.* 2012, David *et al.* 2012, Vassilieva *et al.* 2013), where these medium-sized, mostly terrestrial snakes are encountered in various habitats from montane and lowland tropical forests to coastal dunes.

Given the impressive diversity of kukri snakes, it is not surprising that the ongoing investigations of the herpetofauna of Vietnam are revealing new species, even in areas that are quite popular for tourism and that are considered scientifically well studied.

During field surveys in Binh Chau–Phuoc Buu Nature Reserve in Ba Ria–Vung Tau Province, Vietnam, we collected, in the coastal resort zone, several specimens of a snake species obviously belonging to the genus *Oligodon* but not fitting any diagnosis of known species. A close examination of the specimens and the comparison of their external morphological traits and hemipenial morphology with those of other *Oligodon* species revealed that they display a unique combination of characters that differs significantly from all described taxa. Herein they are assigned to a new species, which is described below.

Material and methods

Herpetological surveys in Binh Chau–Phuoc Buu Nature Reserve were undertaken from 7 to 18 November 2010, from 7 to 14 November 2011, from 6 to 13 July 2012, and from 11 to 17 November 2014.