

The Validity of *Elaphe perlacea*, a Rare Endemic Snake from Sichuan Province, China

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Introduction

Recently Schulz (1989) reported on the validity of the specific status of *Elaphe perlacea* Stejneger, 1929. Schulz (1989) concluded, "Since data appear to be chiefly within the range of *E. mandarina*, *E. perlacea* is supposed to be placed in a subspecies rank of *E. mandarina* pointing out that further investigations may reveal that it is even a variety only." *Elaphe perlacea* is an endemic to Sichuan Province, China. For fifty years after the description of *Elaphe perlacea* by Stejneger (1929) no specimens were found. Many herpetologists including those of China doubted its validity.

In the last ten years three additional specimens have been found in Sichuan Province (Table 1, 2). Two of these specimens (80-1, 87-2, and 88-3) were examined by me. All three specimens have a dorsal scale formula of 19-19-17, 7 upper labials (the third and fourth entering the eye), one preocular, two post oculars, 1+2 temporals, and a divided anal. Both the scale counts and the patterns are similar to those of the type. The new material differs from that of the type in having: 1) Four

lower labials in contact with the anterior chin shield; 2) Dorsal scales of the male are smooth, only the posterior 2 to 3 middle rows are slightly keeled; 3) slight modification of the dorsal head pattern (Fig. 1).

Elaphe perlacea differs from *E. mandarina* (Cantor) in many ways. *E. mandarina* has: 1) 23 scale rows on the neck and mid-body, 19 or 21 before the vent; 2) Two anterior temporal scales (occasionally one); 3) A much different dorsal pattern. Thus, *Elaphe perlacea* is a valid species.

On a field trip during May of 1989 I went to Hailuo Gou one of the new localities. On the way we passed through a small town, Moxi. In the market were several *Elaphe perlacea* skins. This suggests that this snake is common in this area.

The type locality of *Elaphe perlacea* is Yachow Prefecture (Ya'an Prefecture), Sichuan Province, China. This is an imprecise locality since a prefecture is quite large. The two new localities are not in this prefecture but are close to it. The new

TABLE 1. *Elaphe perlacea* specimens found in Sichuan recently.

Sex, Number	Locality	Altitude (m)	Date	Snout-vent (mm)	Tail (mm)
Male	Hailuo Gou, Luding	2500	22 Oct 1987	—	—
Male, 87-2	Hailuo Gou, Luding	2500	22 Oct 1988	884	146
Female, 88-3	Hailuo Gou, Luding	2000	5 Jun 1988	1055	189
Female, 80-1	Wolong, Wenchuan	2000	Apr 1980	865	194

TABLE 2. Scale counts of *Elaphe perlacea* Stejneger, 1929.

Sex	Locality	Dorsal	Ventral	Anal	Subcaudal	Upper labial	Lower labial	Pre & post ocular	Temporal
M	Yachow, the type specimen	19-19-17	229	2	69/69+1	2-2-3	(3)	1-2	1+2
M	Hailuo Gou, Luding	19-19-17	231	2	62/62+1	2-2-3	9(4)	1-2	1+2
F	Wolong, Wenchuan	19-19-17	224	2	67/67+1	2-2-3	8/9(4)	1-2	1+2

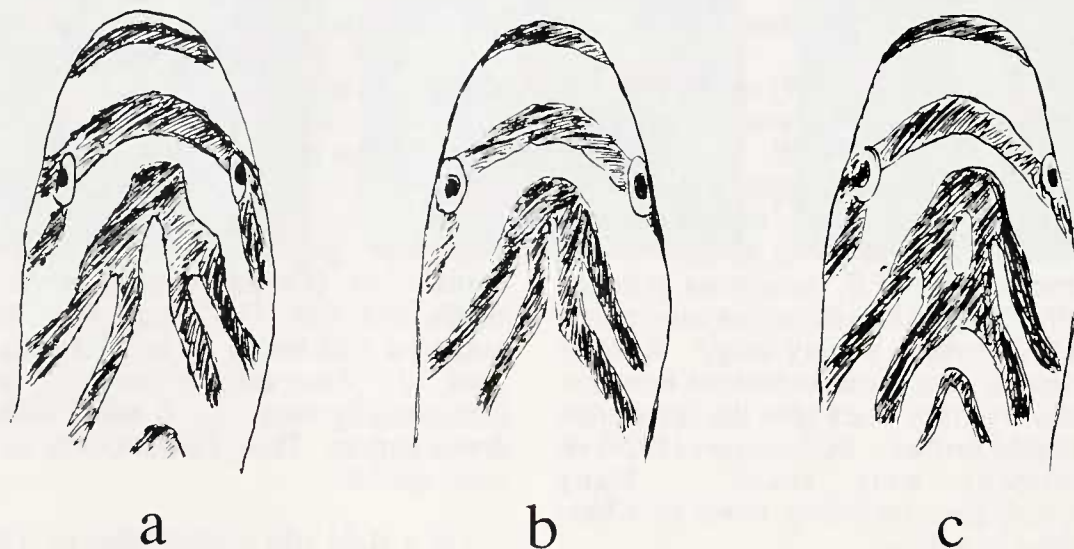
FIG. 1. Back of head of *Elaphe perlacea*, showing the main pattern. a. Male, type specimen. b. Female from Wolong. c. Male from Hailuo Gou.

FIG. 2. Map of Sichuan showing approximate position of localities.

localities are: Elev. 2000 and 2500 m, Hailuo Gou, Luding County, Garze Zang Autonomous Prefecture, and Elev. 2000 m, Wolong, Wenchuan County, Aba (Ngawa) Zang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, China (Fig. 2). As presently understood *Elaphe perlacea* is endemic to Sichuan Province, China, and only occurs in the foot hills of the Himalayan Plateau directly west of the Sichuan Basin.

Literature Cited

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