

Ophiophagous behaviour of the Two-lined Coral Snake *Calliophis bilineatus* on Palawan Island, Philippines

Emerson Y. SY & Raymond V. GONZALES
emersonsy@gmail.com (Sy)

Observers: Raymond V. Gonzales, Yuri May Bonifacio, Alex Espena Josue, Boy Alejandria.

Photograph by: Raymond V. Gonzales.

Subjects identified by: Emerson Y. Sy.

Location: Mount Mantalingajan, Municipality of Brooke's Point, Palawan Island, Philippines.

Elevation: 1200 metres

Habitat: Primary, lower montane forest.

Date and time: 01 February 2016, 15:00 hrs.

Identity of subjects: Two-lined Coral Snake, *Calliophis bilineatus* (Reptilia: Squamata: Serpentes).

Description of record:

A Two-lined Coral Snake was observed along a small foot trail, biting a conspecific by the neck (Fig. 1). As the predator was disturbed by the observers, it dragged the struggling prey into an area with dense leaf litter, intertwining vines, and saplings. The prey initially attempted to resist by anchoring its tail on vines/saplings, but the bigger and stronger predator prevailed. Subsequently, the prey was motionless. The event was observed for more than two minutes before both snakes were obscured by leaf litter and plants.



Fig. 1.

© Raymond V. Gonzales

Remarks: The elapid snakes were identified as *Calliophis bilineatus* based on (i) head not distinct from neck, (ii) prefrontal scales are cream in colour (typical individuals have orange prefrontals), (iii) a median black stripe from frontal to tail, covering three rows and two half rows of scales, (iv) a pair of yellow (typical colour is cream) dorsolateral stripes, (v) ventral scales with alternating black bars, two- or three-scale wide, (vi) narrow white line on the sides, between ventral and body scales, and (vii) underside of tail is vivid reddish-orange in colour (Taylor, 1922). *Calliophis bilineatus* is endemic to the Philippines and is known to occur on the islands of Balabac, Busuanga, Calauit, Culion, and Palawan (Taylor, 1922; Leviton, 1963).

Calliophis bilineatus was formerly considered a subspecies of *Calliophis intestinalis* (Leviton, 1963; Alcalá, 1986), however, we follow Leviton *et al.* (2014) in treating it as a distinct species. Ophiophagous behaviour has been documented in *Calliophis intestinalis* (Das, 2010) and among Philippine snakes, King Cobra *Ophiophagus hannah*, Double-barred Coral Snake *Hemibungarus gemianulis*, Alcalá's Triangle-spotted Snake *Cyclocorus lineatus alcalai*, and Common Mock Viper *Psammodynastes pulverulentus* (Taylor, 1922; Langenberger, 2004; Gaulke, 2011). Although the actual consumption of the snake was not observed, this note may be the first record of cannibalistic and ophiophagous behaviour in *Calliophis bilineatus*.

Editor's note: The yellow-striped morph *Calliophis bilineatus* can easily be misidentified as *Sibynophis bivittatus*. In the original document first published on 29 January 2018 (now withdrawn and deleted from servers), the predator was misidentified as the latter species. This error is corrected here.

References:

- Alcalá, A.C. (1986). *Guide to Philippine flora and Fauna, Volume X. amphibians and reptiles*. Natural Resources Management Center and University of the Philippines, Quezon City, Philippines. xiv + 195 pp
- Das, I. (2010). *A Field Guide to the Reptiles of South-east Asia*. New Holland Publishers (UK) Ltd. 376 pp.
- Gaulke, M. (2011). *The herpetofauna of Panay Island, Philippines*. Edition Chimaira, Frankfurt am Main. 390 pp.
- Langenberger, G. (2004). Ophiophagus behavior in *Psammodynastes pulverulentus* in the Philippines. *Hamadryad* 29(1): 140.
- Leviton, A.E. (1963). Contribution to a review of Philippine snakes, III. The snakes of the genera *Maticora* and *Calliophis*. *Philippine Journal of Science* 92(4): 523-550.
- Leviton, A.E., Brown, R.M., and Siler, C.D. (2014). The dangerously venomous snakes of the Philippine Archipelago, pp. 473- 530. In Williams, G.C. and Gosliner, M. (eds.). *The Coral Triangle: The 2011 Hearst Philippine biodiversity expedition*. California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, California.
- Taylor, E.H. (1922). *The snakes of the Philippine Islands*. Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Bureau of Science, Manila. 312 pp. + 37 plates.