

Two roadkill records of Monocled Cobra *Naja kaouthia* from Peninsular Malaysia

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SIGHTING RECORD: 1

Observer: Leong Tzi Ming.

Photographs by: Anon.

Subject identified by: Leong Tzi Ming.

Location: Route 55 (Raub-Kuala Kubu Road), approximately 3 km south of 'The Gap' (Semangko Pass), near Fraser's Hill, Selangor, Peninsular Malaysia.

Elevation: Estimated as 800 metres (based on Google Earth).

Habitat: Two-lane road passing through primary hill forest.

Date and time: 19 March 2014, 16:15 hrs.

Identity of subject: Monocled Cobra, *Naja kaouthia* (Reptilia: Squamata: Elapidae).

Description of record: A fresh roadkill, with an estimated total length of 100 cm, was found whilst driving along the road from The Gap to Kuala Kubu Baru. The body immediately posterior to the hood appeared to have been crushed by a vehicle. The specimen was moved to the side of the road, photographed (Fig. 1) and then placed in the forest nearby.



Fig. 1 and inset.

SIGHTING RECORD: 2

Observers: Teresa Teo Güttensohn, Andrew Tay.

Photographs by: Teresa Teo Güttensohn.

Subject identified by: Noel Thomas.

Location: Route 8 (Gua Musang-Kuala Lipis Road), adjacent to the Sungai Yu Eco Viaduct (Jambatan Hidupan Liar), Pahang, Peninsular Malaysia. (Lat 4° 32.58'N Long 101° 59.20'E).

Elevation: 150 metres.

Habitat: Two lane road adjacent to newly constructed 6-lane elevated highway passing through a mosaic of degraded primary forest, secondary scrub forest and roadside grassland.

Date and time: 17 October 2017, noon.

Identity of subject: Monocled Cobra, *Naja kaouthia* (Reptilia: Squamata: Elapidae).

Description of record: A fresh roadkill, with an estimated total length of 120 cm, was found whilst driving along the old Gua Musang-Kuala Lipis road, adjacent to the newly constructed Sungai Yu Eco Viaduct. The viaduct was designed to allow free movement of wildlife between the forest to the east (i.e. the western side of Taman Negara, Peninsular Malaysia's largest national park) and the forest to the west (i.e. forest reserves on the eastern side of the Titiwangsa mountains. The roadkill was found on the old road, which in places runs parallel to the new, elevated road. The snake had sustained injuries immediately behind the hood and on the posterior part of the body (Fig 2 and inset).

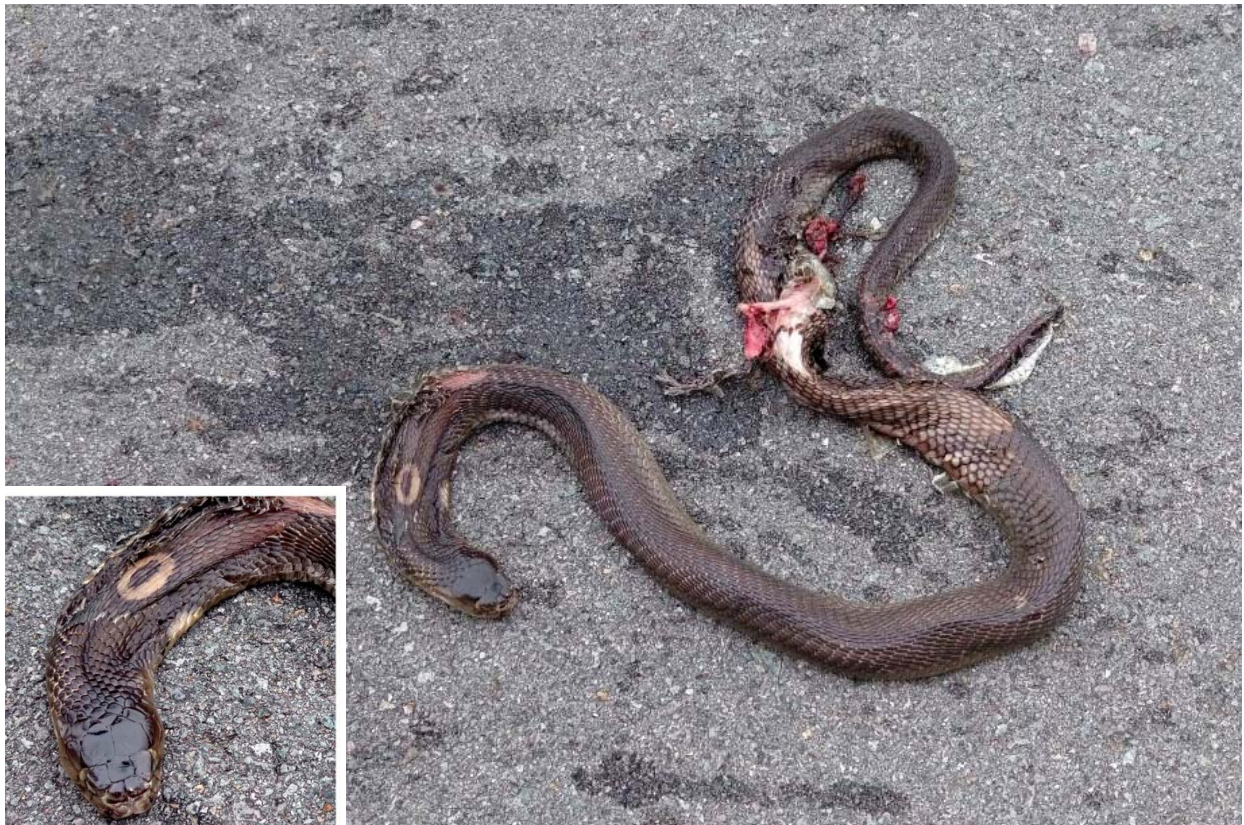


Fig. 2 and inset.

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GENERAL REMARKS

The two snakes featured here are clearly recognisable as *Naja kaouthia* as both bear the diagnostic ocellus pattern on the rear of the hood (Fig. 1 inset and Fig. 2 inset).

Naja kaouthia has long been recognised as a component of the snake fauna of the northern states of Peninsular Malaysia (Tweedie, 1957, as *Naja naja kaouthia*). Curiously, Tweedie (1957) states that "The spectacle mark on the top or back of the hood, seen in Indian cobras, is not found in Malayan specimens".

Sighting records from the state of Pahang, the largest state in Peninsular Malaysia (which is a centrally located state bordering the northern states of Perak and Kelantan and the southern state of Johor) appear to be uncommon. The latitude of Sighting Record 1, located just 3 km south of Fraser's Hill, is considered significant as it probably lies at the southernmost limit of the species. The elevation of Sighting Record 1 is also considered significant as there appear to have been no records at Fraser's Hill or near The Gap: Norhayati *et al* (2011) do not record *Naja kaouthia* (or its close relative *Naja sumatrana*) from Fraser's Hill or from The Gap.

There are anecdotal reports of *Naja kaouthia* from northern Selangor, including the town of Rawang, but there appear to be no published records to support this: it is possible that there are escapees of the species, given its popularity amongst snake charmers, snake shows and exhibitions (Evan Quah, pers. comm.). Sighting Record 1 appears unlikely to be an escapee as the nearest towns, Raub and Kuala Kubu Baru, are both around 16 km away.

Ithnin *et al* (2017) conducted a questionnaire survey which concluded that *Naja kaouthia* occurred throughout Peninsular Malaysia, however no detailed sighting records were included in the poster which summarised these findings, and we feel that their statement warrants further verification in the field: the proposed second part of their study ('actual count survey') may determine the true extent of the species.

Das (2010) quotes an elevation limit of 820 metres for the species (i.e. a similar elevation to Sighting Record 1): it is not clear if this figure is from Peninsular Malaysia or from other parts of its range, which includes parts of India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, southern China, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

There appears to be some colour difference between the two specimens illustrated here, with one being blackish and the other brown. Das (2010) describes the dorsal colour of this snake as "... brown, greyish-brown, blackish-brown or pale yellow".

References:

- Das, I. (2010). *A Field Guide to the Reptiles of South-east Asia*. New Holland Publishers (UK) Ltd. 376 pp.
- Hartini Ithnin, Norazlinda A. Razak, Mohd Azizol Aziz, Khairul Nizam Kamaruddin & Jeffrine Rovie-Ryan Japning. (Nov 2017). Distribution of Monocled Cobra (*Naja kaouthia*) in Peninsular Malaysia: A Questionnaire Survey. Poster Presentation, Perhilitan Biodiversity Seminar at Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.
- Norhayati, A., Farah, A. D., Chan, K. O., Daicus, B., & Muin, M. A. (2011). An Update of Herpetofaunal Records from Bukit Fraser, Pahang, Peninsular Malaysia. *Malays. Appl. Biol*, 40(2), 9-17.
- Tweedie, M. W. F. (1957). *The Snakes of Malaya*. Government Printing Office, Singapore. 143 pp.