

## King Cobra *Ophiophagus hannah* predation on Palawan Water Monitor *Varanus palawanensis* in the Philippines

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**Photograph by:** Bianca Kaye C. Ong.

**Subjects identified by:** Emerson Y. Sy.

**Location:** Miniloc Island, Barangay Bebeladan, Municipality of El Nido, Palawan Province, Philippines.

**Elevation:** 7 metres.

**Habitat:** Beach resort, near limestone forest.

**Date and time:** 19 July 2018, 13:00 hrs.

**Identity of subjects:**

- i) King Cobra, *Ophiophagus hannah* (Reptilia: Squamata: Elapidae).
- ii) Palawan Water Monitor, *Varanus palawanensis* (Reptilia: Squamata: Varanidae).

**Description of record:** A snake was observed on the roof of a hut, in the process of attempting to swallow a monitor lizard head first. Both animals were seen to fall six metres into shallow water (Fig. 1), probably as a result of a struggle. Whilst latched on to the lizard's head, the snake slithered backwards toward the seawall. The area has high foot traffic, and the resort staff decided to intervene. While being captured the snake regurgitated the lizard, before being relocated to an area with minimal human presence.



Fig. 1.

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**Remarks:** The snake was identified as *Ophiophagus hannah* based on (i) dorsal body colour is olive brown, (ii) large parietal and occipital scales, (iii) loreal scale is absent, (iv) one preocular, and (v) three postoculars (Taylor, 1922).

After being released from the grip of the cobra, the lizard was identified as *Varanus palawanensis* based on (i) head colour is predominantly black, (ii) an off-white temporal stripe, (iii) throat is off-white with black spots, (iv) enlarged nuchal scales and (v) dorsal colour is mainly black with some yellowish scales on the body, limbs, and tail (Koch et al., 2010).

The King Cobra is a species complex with widespread distribution from South Asia to Southeast Asia (Das, 2002). In the Philippines, King Cobra has been documented previously on several small and large islands (Sy & Wallbank, 2013; Sy & Dichaves, 2017; Sy & Tabayag, 2018).

The Palawan Water Monitor is endemic to the Palawan faunal region and occurs on the following islands: Balabac, Busuanga, Calauit, Candaraman, Coron, Lagen, Malapina, Palawan, Sibutu (Koch et al., 2010). *Varanus palawanensis* is the second Philippine monitor lizard known to be predated by this well-known ophiophagous snake. This paper provides the first distributional record for both species on Miniloc Island.

#### **References:**

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