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Title *Ahaetulla farnsworthi* (Farnsworth's Vine Snake) predation on *Oligodon affinis* (Malabar Brown Kukri Snake)

Authors Jon Hakim^{1*}, Surya Gowda²

¹ Creative Conservation Alliance, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

² Kalinga Centre for Rainforest Ecology, Agumbe, Karnataka, India.

*Corresponding Author: jgdhakim@gmail.com

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Ahaetulla farnsworthi is an arboreal, diurnal predator of the central Western Ghats. Until its description in Mallik et al. (2020), *A. farnsworthi* was lumped within *Ahaetulla nasuta*, a species complex which ranged across most of the Indian subcontinent. Kalki and Weiss (2020) reviewed 209 published notes, citizen science records, and social media posts and found that the observed diet of the *A. nasuta* complex is primarily comprised of frogs, lizards, and snakes, with 20% of the total diet being snake prey. *Oligodon affinis*, a nocturnal snake which ranges across the central and southern Western Ghats (Whitaker and Captain 2004), was not recorded as a prey item of any species in the *A. nasuta* complex.

Reported here is the first observation of *A. farnsworthi* preying on *O. affinis*. On 1 August 2023, the authors walked a dirt road at the Kalinga Centre for Rainforest Ecology, a research station in the mid-elevation rainforest near Agumbe in the Western Ghats of Karnataka (13.574665°N, 75.106837°E, ca. 650 m a.s.l.). At 19:50 h, we observed an adult *A. farnsworthi* swallowing a significantly smaller *O. affinis* (Fig. 1a-c). The *A. farnsworthi* was positioned ~2 m above the ground, potentially having retreated to a higher perch after initially striking down to take the *O. affinis* off the forest floor. The observation is interesting in that it occurred an hour after sundown, unusually late for this diurnal *Ahaetulla*. We suspect it is most likely that the *A. farnsworthi* captured its prey in the fading light of dusk and had taken this long to progress in the feeding process. Photos of the encounter were deposited at the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum as ZRC(IMG) 2.682a-c.

The *A. farnsworthi* was identified via the Mallik et al. (2020) diagnostic of a green vine snake with short rostral appendage and presence in the Agumbe-Kodachadri range. The *O. affinis* was identified based on it being a small brown kukri snake with dark, broken crossbars and a yellow venter with rectangular black marks (Whitaker and Captain 2004). Both identifications were confirmed by Vivek Sharma (pers. comm.).

This incident elucidates how snakes can interact across the boundaries of their attributed diurnal/nocturnal and arboreal/terrestrial activity patterns, reminding us of the lack of hard boundaries. As is often said in the field, “snakes don’t read the guides.”

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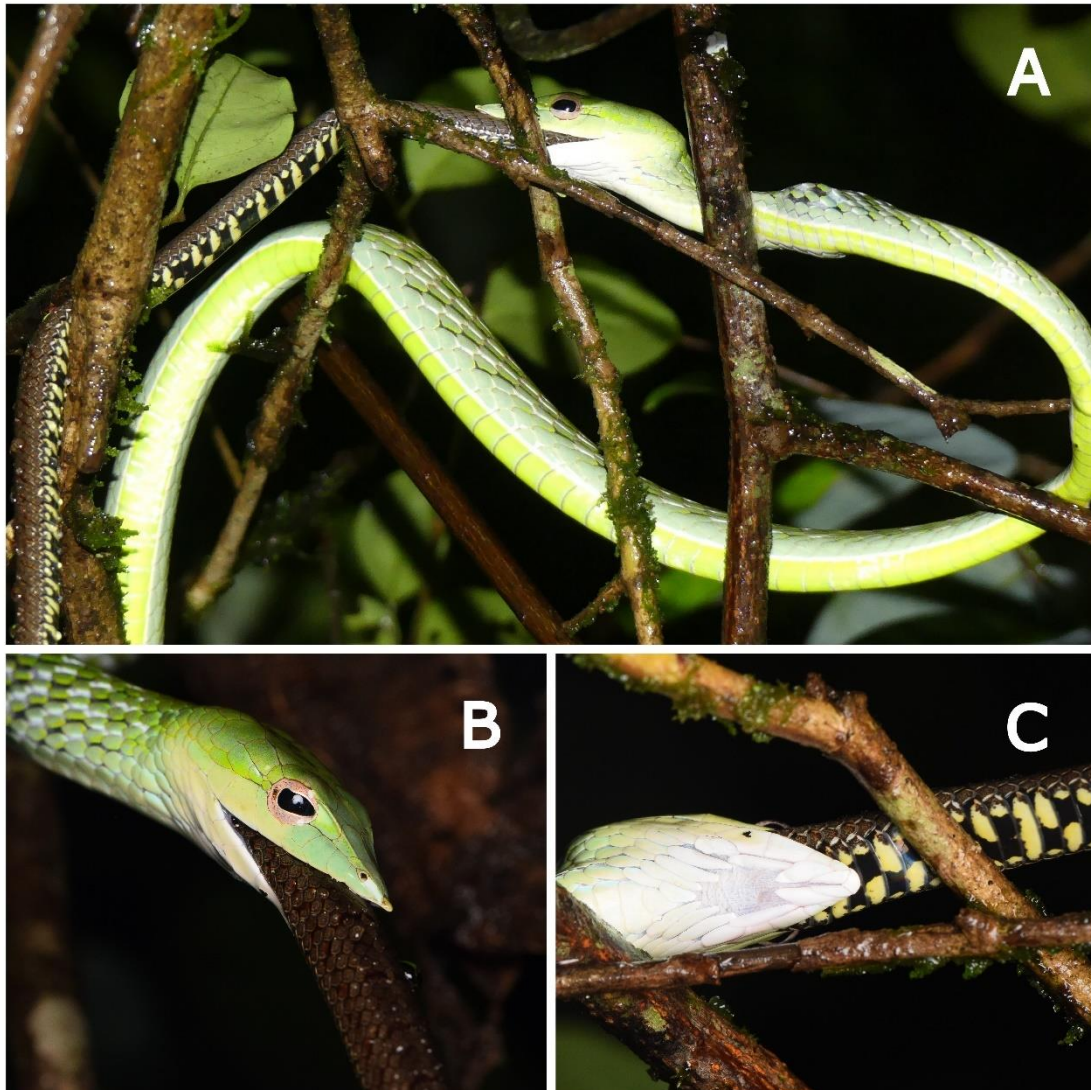


Figure 1. *Ahaetulla farnsworthi* preying on *Oligodon affinis* [ZRC(IMG) 2.682a-c] with **A.** full body view, **B.** dorsolateral view of *A. farnsworthi* head and *O. affinis*, and **C.** ventral view of *A. farnsworthi* head and *O. affinis*. Photo 1A by Jon Hakim, Photos 1B-1C by Surya Gowda.