

Title Predation Behaviour of the Northern King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*): Field Observations from Bangladesh

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The Northern King Cobra *Ophiophagus hannah* (Cantor, 1836) is the longest terrestrial venomous snake in the world that is distributed in parts of Indian and Indochinese subregions from Sivalik foothills in the northwest to central Thailand in the southeast (Whitaker & Captain, 2004; Das & Das, 2017; Das et al., 2024). It was described from the Sundarbans mangroves that cover parts of West Bengal, India, and the adjacent Bangladesh (Bhattacharyya & Mitra, 2005). In Bangladesh, it is generally found in natural habitats such as forests, shrublands, grasslands, and wetlands (inland), as well as in human-modified environments including tea estates, roadsides, fish ponds, canals, and drainage systems, particularly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Sylhet, and Sundarbans areas (Stuart et al. 2012; IUCN Bangladesh 2015). Their diet includes mostly snakes, occasionally monitor lizards (Whitaker & Captain, 2004; Hasan et al., 2014; Joshi, 2014; Dolia, 2018; Koirala & Tshering, 2021), and an exceptional case of feeding on a frog (Basu & Chandramouli, 2023). Herein we report on two cases of king cobra predations where it consumed a common cobra (*Naja* sp.) and a trinket snake (*Coelognathus radiatus*) in a protected area in Bangladesh.

On 3rd September 2022 at 11:12 h we encountered a king cobra feeding on a copper headed trinket snake (*Coelognathus radiatus*) in a drain near the Satchari National Park Government Rest House (24.1278° N, 91.4421° E). The size of the king cobra was estimated to be approximately 4 m in length, and the trinket was approximately 1 m long (Fig. 1). The king cobra ingested the prey without constricting it and took around 60 minutes to completely swallow the prey. After that, the king cobra entered the forest undergrowth. The king cobra was seen to slowly twist its head and swallow the trinket from anterior to posterior end.

On 25th September 2022, at 15:00 h, we encountered a king cobra consuming a cobra, possibly *Naja kaouthia*, on the steep slope of a sandy dry stream between the tea garden and palm vegetation near a road in Satchari National Park, Churarughat, Habiganj (24.1273°N, 91.4383°E). The king cobra was approximately 4 m long and the common cobra was approximately 1.8 m in length (Fig. 2). When we noticed the feeding event, the king cobra had already ingested half of the body of the common cobra from the anterior end. The king cobra took 13 minutes to consume the remaining part of the prey entirely, and then left the place quickly due to human presence.

All king cobras primarily feed on snakes, including venomous and non-venomous snakes, and play an important role in controlling other snake populations in an area (Das et al., 2024). It has been documented that the Northern King Cobra preys on the following snake species: Banded Krait (*Bungarus fasciatus*); White Striped Coral Snake (*Calliophis bivirgatus*), Green Whip Snake (*Ahaetulla* spp.), Blyth's Keelback (*Rhabdophis platyceps*), Anderson's Wolf Snake (*Lycodon fasciatus*), and Blyth's Snake (*Trachischium reticulatum*), Indian Rat Snake (*Ptyas mucosa*), Reticulated Python (*Malayopython reticulatus*); Green Pit Viper (*Trimeresurus* spp.), and Black-tailed trinket (*Coelognathus flavolineatus*) (Baral & Rajesh 2020; Vazifdar & Khalid, 2021; Wall 1924) in the wild. Our observations of the Northern king cobra preying on *Naja* sp. and *Coelognathus radiatus* constitute additions to the previously documented prey records. These observations from Bangladesh contribute significantly to the current understanding of the feeding behaviour and ecological role of *Ophiophagus hannah* in the wild.

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Figure 1: *Ophiophagus hannah* feeding on *Coelognathus radiatus* in a drain near the Satchari National Park Government Rest House.



Figure 2 (A–C): *Ophiophagus hannah* feeding on *Naja* sp. in a dry sandy stream at Satchari National Park, Habiganj, Bangladesh.