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**A report on ophiophagy observed
in *Naja oxiana* (Eichwald 1831)
from Himachal Pradesh, India**

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The central Asian cobra *Naja oxiana* (Eich-
wald 1831) is a species of venomous snake in
the family Elapidae that ranges from the Tran-
scaspian region of central Asia all the way down
to India (Smith 1943; Wall 1911; Wüster &
Thorpe 1992; Wallach et al. 2009). The pres-
ence of *Naja oxiana* in Himachal Pradesh was
recently confirmed by Santra et al. (2019). De-
spite a seemingly wide distribution, there is a
broad gap in our knowledge of the natural his-
tory of the species. There are no published re-
cords of its dietary composition, except a broad
mention that it feeds on amphibians, lizards, and
small rodents (Whitaker & Captain 2008). Here
we present the first verified observations to our
knowledge of ophiophagy in *Naja oxiana*.

The first instance was observed in Jukyani
village (32°51'32"N, 76°08'41"E, 1624 m
a.s.l.), situated in Chamba district of Himachal
Pradesh. On 7 July 2020 at 17:25 h, a *Naja ox-*
iana was found in a villager's house during a
rescue operation. The snake measuring a total
length of ca. 119 cm was observed feeding on

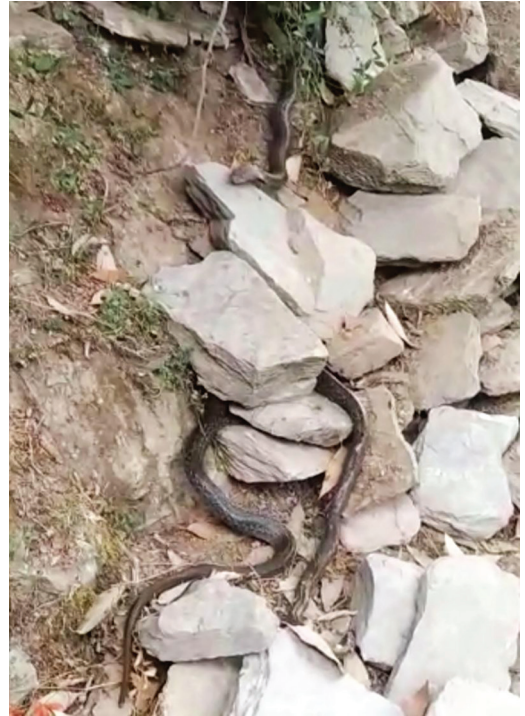


Figure 1. *Naja oxiana* returning to the dead *Elaphe hodgsoni*.

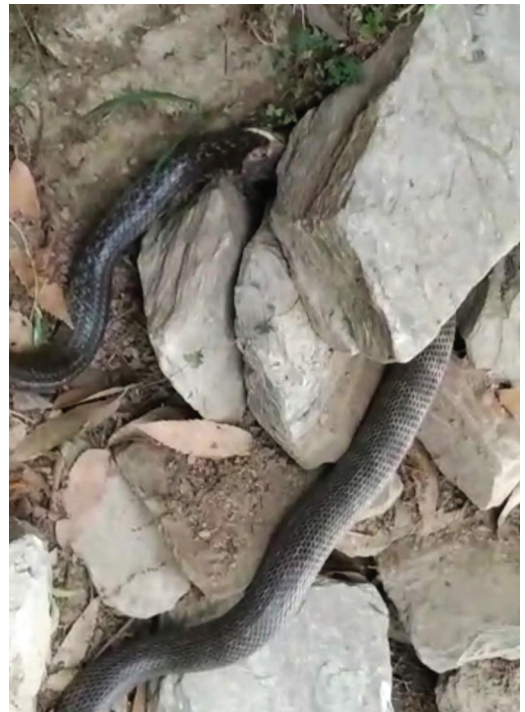


Figure 2. *Naja oxiana* feeding on *Elaphe hodgsoni*.

an *Elaphe hodgsoni* (Günther 1860). During capture, the snake regurgitated the specimen of *E. hodgsoni*, which measured a total length of ca. 92 cm.

The second instance was observed near Chamaravillage (32°50'13"N, 76°08'40"E, 1624 m a.s.l.), situated in Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh, 2.37 km away from Jukyani. On 15 August 2020, at 14:21 h, an adult *N. oxiana* was observed feeding on an *E. hodgsoni*. The anterior portion of *N. oxiana* was hidden behind a stone with one third of the prey snake already swallowed. The cobra regurgitated the prey as it was disturbed by a crowd that had gathered and entered a burrow nearby. The snake returned to the dead *E. hodgsoni* after a few minutes, but was disturbed by the crowd again and moved away.

The range of *E. hodgsoni* and *N. oxiana* overlaps in Himachal Pradesh, as well as in Jammu and Kashmir in India. It is likely that *E. hodgsoni* might form a part of the diet of the latter in this range. Further studies are necessary to ascertain if *Naja oxiana* feeds exclusively on serpents, or includes snakes as part of a broader range of prey items. The present report is noteworthy as it adds to our understanding of an otherwise poorly known elapid species.

Acknowledgments

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Additional locality reports of *Calliophis castoe* Smith, Ogale, Deepak & Giri, 2012 (Squamata, Elapidae) from the Western Ghats, India

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