

A tick-infested reticulated python

Subjects: Reticulated python, *Malayopython reticulatus* (Reptilia: Serpentes: Pythonidae).
Hard tick, unidentified genus and species (Arachnida: Parasitiformes: Ixodidae).

Subjects identified by: Contributor & Marcus Chua.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Central Catchment Nature Reserve, stream along Venus Trail; 14 August 2014, 1008 hrs.

Habitat: Secondary forest, in shallow fresh water stream.

Observers: Contributor & Lena Chow.

Observation: A reticulated python of about 1.2 m total length was found dead in the stream with its head under water. The snake was emaciated and had a total of 14 ticks of various sizes (between 7 and 18 mm), many bloated with blood, on its head; mainly on the lower jaw (Fig. 1-3). In addition, an unidentified worm-like organism of about 5 cm (Fig. 4), probably a parasitic nematode, crawled out from the mouth of the python.

Remarks: The reticulated python is relatively common in Singapore (Baker & Lim, 2012: 91, as *Broghammerus reticulatus*), and most of these snakes have ticks on them. However, the present specimen had an unusually large number of ticks, concentrated largely along the lower jaw. The cause of death is unknown, but the emaciated condition of the snake suggests that it may have starved. The ticks could have contributed to their host's demise by placing an intense amount of weight and obstruction on the lower jaw, thus making it difficult for the snake to feed. The python may even have succumbed to possible toxic salivary secretions injected into its bloodstream by the ticks (see Court & Wang, 2011). The nematode seems to suggest that the snake had a high parasitic load in its digestive tract, but this was not investigated.

References:

- Baker, N. & K. K. P. Lim, 2012. *Wild Animals of Singapore. A Photographic Guide to Mammals, Reptiles, Amphibians and Freshwater Fishes.* Updated edition. Draco Publishing and Distribution Pte. Ltd. and Nature Society (Singapore). 180 pp.
- Court, D. J. & L. K. Wang, 2011. Ticks. In: Ng, P. K. L., R. T. Corlett & H. T. W. Tan (eds.). *Singapore Biodiversity. An Encyclopedia of the Natural Environment and Sustainable Development.* Editions Didier Millet and the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research, Singapore. p. 483.



Fig. 1. Right side of the python's head showing the extent of tick infestation. Photograph by Law Ing Sind

Fig. 2. Left side of the python's head showing the extent of tick infestation.



Fig. 3. Underside of the python's head showing the extent of tick infestation.



Fig. 4. Unidentified worm, possibly a parasitic nematode, that emerged from the python's mouth.

Photographs by Law Ing Sind

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