

A food item of the blackwater mud snake

Subjects: Blackwater mud snake, *Phytolopsis punctata* (Reptilia: Serpentes: Homalopsidae).
Forest walking catfish, *Clarias leiacanthus* (Teleostei: Siluriformes: Clariidae).

Subjects identified by: Contributors.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Central Catchment Nature Reserve, Nee Soon swamp forest; 22 November 2014.

Habitat: Freshwater swamp forest, in water-logged area.

Observers: Contributors.

Observation: A large adult female example of 63.5 cm snout-vent length and 72.0 cm total length was found dead in a submerged trap used for an on-going biodiversity survey. Upon dissection, a forest walking catfish of 13.6 cm standard length (from snout tip to tail base) was retrieved (Figs. 1 & 2). The pectoral spine of the ingested catfish had pierced through the gut wall of the snake, but not yet through the skin. The snake is presumed to have died either from asphyxiation or from the puncture of its gut wall by its ingested prey.

Remarks: The occurrence of the blackwater mud snake in Singapore is first recorded by Thomas et al. (2014) based on two smaller examples obtained at the same general area. The natural history of this apparently rare species is virtually unknown, except it is typically associated with acid-water and peat swamps (Murphy, 2007: 162, as *Enhydryis punctata*). *Clarias leiacanthus* appears to be the first recorded food item of this snake. The present specimen, catalogued as ZRC.2.7085, is deposited in the Zoological Reference Collection of the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum at the National University of Singapore.

References:

- Murphy, J. C., 2007. *Homalopsid snakes: Evolution in the mud*. Krieger Publishing Company, Malabar, Florida, USA. 249 pp.
- Thomas, N., T. Li, W. Lim & Y. Cai, 2014. New record of the blackwater mud snake in Singapore. *Singapore Biodiversity Records*. 2014: 309-310.

Note: This observation was made during a survey of the aquatic biodiversity of the Nee Soon swamp forest under the 'Nee Soon Swamp Forest Biodiversity and Hydrology Baseline Studies – Phase II' project jointly conducted by the National Parks Board and the National University of Singapore (Tropical Marine Science Institute, Department of Biological Sciences, Department of Geography and the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum).

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Fig. 1. Dorsal view of ZRC 2.7085. The bulge indicated by the red bracket contained the ingested prey.



Fig. 2. Ventral view of ZRC 2.7085, with the retrieved food item, a *Clarias leiacanthus*.

Photographs by Tan Heok Hui