

## King cobra attacking reticulated python

**Subjects:** King cobra, *Ophiophagus hannah* (Reptilia: Serpentes: Elapidae);  
Reticulated python, *Malayopython reticulatus* (Reptilia: Serpentes: Pythonidae).

**Subjects identified by:** Contributor.

**Location, date and time:** Singapore Island, Nanyang Technological University Jurong Campus off Jalan Bahar, Nanyang Drive, at the western edge of the campus, beside the Research Techno Plaza building; 27 August 2015; between 1200 and 2200 hrs.

**Habitat:** Suburban parkland, bordered by secondary forest and scrub. On a pedestrian footpath and grass verge at the side of a road.

**Observers:** Contributor, with at least 30 other human spectators.

**Observations:** Around 1200 hrs, in hot and sunny weather, a king cobra of about 3.6 m total length was seen at the side of the road with a python of between 1.5 and 2 m total length coiled around its head over the kerb (Fig. 1). The cobra appeared to be biting the rear part of the python (Fig. 2), which had the anterior section stretched out and appeared to be disorientated and gasping (Figs. 3 & 4). In trying to twist itself free from the python's presumably suffocating coils, the cobra lowered its entire body onto the road (Figs. 2-4) and, writhing about, turned in an anti-clockwise direction back up to the kerb. While it was doing that, the python took the opportunity to bite the midsection of the cobra (Fig. 5). As it was most likely weak from the cobra's venom, it did not maintain its hold on the cobra. Finally, after around 15 to 20 minutes of struggle during which both snakes had narrowly escaped being run over by passing vehicles, the cobra managed to move its entire body back on to the grass verge with the python throwing more coils around the cobra's head (Fig. 6). With some effort, it somehow freed its head from the python's grip, then promptly turned around and immediately slid into the bushes at the side of the road, probably to escape the overwhelming attention of the human onlookers. The seemingly exhausted and listless python was left bunched up at the side of the road. Shortly after, it was removed by personnel from the campus's pest control unit.

At around 1600 hrs, the cobra returned to the spot where it had attacked the python (Fig. 7). It slipped away just as personnel from the campus's pest control unit and Animal Concerns, Research and Education Society (ACRES) showed up. Because it had stayed in the vicinity, the cobra was eventually captured at around 2200 hrs. It was said to have been released at an undisclosed location in Mandai.

**Remarks:** This sighting of a king cobra trying to subdue its prey that put up a strong resistance has been reported by Chew (2015). The king cobra, which specializes in feeding largely on other snakes, has a wide distribution in Singapore and does not seem to be particularly rare. It has been recorded from the Western Catchment, an area of secondary forest and scrub which surrounds the campus of the Jurong Technological University (Lim et al., 2011: 148). It is interesting to note that while the cobra fled after it had freed itself from the python's stranglehold (presumably spooked by the human spectators), it did not abandon its prey. It had returned to the same spot to look for the python which would have succumbed to its venom, and would then be easier and safe to eat. This action resulted in the cobra's eventual capture.

### References:

- Chew H. M., 2015. Python versus king cobra in a battle at NTU campus. *The Straits Times* online edition. August 27, 2015, 8:14 pm SGT. <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/python-versus-king-cobra-in-a-battle-at-ntu-campus>
- Lim, K. K. P., T. M. Leong & F. L. K. Lim, 2011. The king cobra, *Ophiophagus hannah* (Cantor) in Singapore (Reptilia: Squamata: Elapidae). *Nature in Singapore*. 4: 143-156.

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Fig. 1. Both snakes on the grass verge with the python coiled around the head of the cobra.



Fig. 2. Cobra started to slide onto the road while grappling with the python.

Photographs by Abhishek Ambede



Fig. 3. The cobra biting the rear section of the python which was coiled around the cobra's neck. The python appeared to be gasping, probably having experienced the effects of the cobra's venom.



Fig. 4. Cobra writhing on the road apparently trying to disentangle itself from the grip of the python's coils.

Photographs by Abhishek Ambede



Fig. 5. Gasping cobra trying to slither back onto the grass. It had lost its grip on the python, which had then turned back to bite the mid-section of the cobra.



Fig. 6. The cobra withdrew its body back onto the grass but the python threw more coils over its head. Shortly after, the cobra managed to free its head from the python's coils and retreated into the bushes, leaving the python bunched up on the side of the road.



Fig. 7. At around 1600 hrs, the cobra reappeared at the scene, apparently searching for the python which had been taken away by the campus's pest control personnel.

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