

Three records of king cobra in the Central Catchment Nature Reserve

Subjects: King cobra, *Ophiophagus hannah* (Reptilia: Serpentes: Elapidae).

Subjects identified by: Contributors.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Central Catchment Nature Reserve, three localities around the central-eastern portion; 5 January, 2 October & 15 October 2015; daytime.

Habitats: Secondary forest with varying degrees of maturity, from regenerating to mature.

Observers: Contributors, with Ian Siah & Raphael Siah.

Observations: Three separate records over 2015:

- 1) On 5 January 2015, a large example of around 3 m total length was observed attempting to cross a road from one forest patch to another at Upper Peirce. When it saw contributor Law Ing Sind, it slithered into a nearby drain culvert where the following photograph (Fig. 1) was taken.
- 2) On 2 October 2015, an adult example of approximately 3 m total length was observed crossing a trail at eastern MacRitchie. It stopped moving when it saw contributor Law Ing Sind, thus allowing photographs (Fig. 2) to be taken. After about a minute it slithered off quickly. A troupe of long tailed macaques (*Macaca fascicularis*) were observed to be visually tracking the cobra and making alarm calls, apparently distressed by the large snake.
- 3) On 15 October 2015, a large cobra nearing 4 m total length was observed basking in a sunspot about 10 m off a forest trail in the Bukit Kalang area. Contributor Serin Subaraj was alerted to its presence by loud warning calls made by four slender squirrels (*Sundasciurus tenuis*), a flock of pin-striped tit-babblers (*Macronus gularis*) and a small mixed flock of olive-winged bulbuls (*Pycnonotus plumosus*) and cream-vented bulbuls (*Pycnonotus simplex*). As the snake had quickly disappeared into the underbrush upon the approach of the observer, no photograph was obtained.

Remarks: Even though the king cobra is regarded as an endangered species in Singapore (Lim et al., 2008: 167), there has been a number of recent sightings (Ambede, 2015; Baker, 2015; Lim et al., 2011). The three large adults featured here immediately went into hiding instead of behaving defensively when approached. This suggests that they are not aggressive and are shy of humans. Nevertheless, it is a large and highly venomous snake, and observers are advised to keep their distance and to leave it well alone.

References:

- Ambede, A., 2015. King cobra attacking reticulated python. *Singapore Biodiversity Records*. 2015: 133-136.
- Baker, N., 2015. King cobra roadkill at Upper Peirce. *Singapore Biodiversity Records*. 2015: 137.
- Lim, K. K. P., N. Baker, R. Teo & T. M. Leong, 2008. Reptiles. In: Davison, G. W. H., P. K. L. Ng & H. C. Ho (eds.). *The Singapore Red Data Book. Threatened Plants & Animals of Singapore*. Second edition. Nature Society (Singapore). p. 160-176.
- 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. King cobra coiled inside a flooded drain culvert at Upper Peirce.



Fig. 2. Partially concealed side view of the head of a king cobra crossing a forest trail at eastern MacRitchie.

Photographs by Law Ing Sind