

Apparent courtship behaviour of the house wolf snake

Subjects: House wolf snake, *Lycodon capucinus* (Reptilia: Serpentes: Colubridae).

Subjects identified by: Mary-Ruth Low.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Mandai Lake Road, compound of Singapore Zoo; 4 January 2017; 0645 hrs.

Habitat: Urban parkland. On wooden boardwalk next to concrete buildings.

Observer: Udhaya Kumar Kalirathinam.

Observation: Two snakes of approximately 70 cm total length each, were observed coiling, biting and chasing each other in apparent pairing behavior. One individual (presumably the male) bit the mid-body of the other (presumably the female) snake (Fig. 1) which kept still and did not struggle (Fig. 2). Approximately two minutes later, the snake stopped biting and aligned its body against the other (Fig. 3). It then attempted to position itself on top of the other snake (Fig. 4) seemingly to achieve mating posture. However, the latter snake moved away from the former and disappeared from the observer's sight into a hole in the building.

Remarks: The observed behaviour appears to be an unsuccessful attempt at mating. Apparently the reproductive behaviour of *Lycodon capucinus* has not been as well documented as that of the closely related common Indo-Pakistan wolf snake, *Lycodon aulicus* (Khan, 2014). Members of the family Colubridae are known to exhibit aggressive courtship behaviour such as biting the dorsal surface of the female. However, such bites seldom result in tissue injury as it is thought that biting stimulates the female 'to assume a more tractable position prior to coitus' (Lillywhite, 2014: 206).



Fig. 1. One snake biting the mid-body of the other. Photograph by Udhaya Kumar Kalirathinam

References:

- Khan, M. S., 2014. Notes on reproduction and defense mechanisms of the common Indo-Pakistan wolf snake *Lycodon aulicus* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Ophidia: Colubridae). *Bulletin of the Chicago Herpetological Society*. 49 (3): 33-34.
- Lillywhite, H. B., 2014. *How Snakes Work: Structure, Function and Behavior of the World's Snakes*. Oxford University Press, New York, USA. 256 pp.



Fig. 2. Despite being bitten, the other snake showed no reaction.



Fig. 3. The snake stopped biting and attempts to align its body against the other snake.



Fig. 4. It then tries to position itself on top of the other snake.

Photographs by Udhaya Kumar Kalirathinam

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