

## Banded file snake hunting and eating a goby

**Subjects:** Banded file snake, *Acrochordus granulatus* (Reptilia: Serpentes: Acrochordidae);  
Buan goby, *Amblygobius buanensis* (Teleostei: Gobiidae).

**Subjects identified by:** Tan Heok Hui & Kelvin K. P. Lim (fish).

**Location, date and time:** Singapore Strait, off the southwestern part of Semakau Landfill; 26 April 2017; 1447-1500 hrs.

**Habitat:** Marine. Sea bed of silty-sand, with fringing seagrass, at 7 m depth, during spring tide ebbing at 1.2 m.

**Observer:** Contributor.

**Observation:** A very dark coloured file snake of about 100 cm total length, was observed moving about on the seabed (Fig. 1). The snake first inserted its head into a hole (Fig. 2). It then pushed its tail into another hole about 20 cm away from the first hole (Fig. 3). In a smooth thrust, the tail moved deeper into the second hole. Then rotating its body (Fig. 4), the snake pulled its head out of the burrow in a cloud of silt (Fig. 5). The snake swam up into the water column, where it looped around (Fig. 6) and fell towards the sea floor (Fig. 7). As it landed, the body wrapped around the head (Fig. 8 & 9), concealing the prey, a fish, which was held in the snake's mouth. The snake pulled its head out of the coils and began to rapidly swallow the prey (Fig. 10-12) which was held in the coils. With the fish fully engulfed in 59 seconds, the snake uncoiled its body (Fig. 13) and 'yawned' (Fig. 14) presumably to realign its jaws. An edited version of the entire sequence can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/eMEAxLY3aa4>.

**Remarks:** This appears to be the first record of an *Acrochordus granulatus* hunting and feeding in the wild in Singapore. Feeding behaviour of this species has been observed in captive snakes (Lillywhite, 1998), and the diet of wild snakes in the Straits of Malacca is known to consist of gobioid fishes (Voris & Glodek, 1980). The featured observation supports the published finds. The purpose of the snake's tail being inserted into the second hole is not clear. There seems to be two possibilities. 1) The holes were entrances to the same burrow, and the tail was inserted to plug the escape route and flush the prey towards the snake's mouth. 2) The holes may not be connected to the same burrow, but with the tail firmly stuffed in the second hole, the snake could anchor itself at one end to facilitate pulling its head and prey out at the other end. As for the snake's constriction of its prey, it is doubtful that this suffocates the fish. With the help of the snake's characteristically rough skin, it is more likely a means to hold firmly on to the slippery fish to prevent it from slipping away while the snake swallows it whole (see Lillywhite, 1998).

From what little that can be viewed of the prey in Fig. 11 & 14, the fish is tentatively identified as a Buan goby, *Amblygobius buanensis*, which is recognised mainly by the colour pattern, and the shape of the body and caudal fin. The caudal peduncle has a dark reddish mid-lateral stripe that ends in a white blotch and blackish blotch at the base of the caudal fin. The round caudal fin has pinkish longitudinal lines across the upper and lower portions. The abdomen is white, and the pelvic fins unmarked (see illustration of fish in Allen & Erdmann, 2012: 955). *Amblygobius buanensis* is recorded from Singapore waters by Larson et al. (2016: 749).

### References:

- Allen, G. R. & M. V. Erdmann, 2012. *Reef Fishes of the East Indies. Volume III*. Tropical Reef Research, Perth, Australia. pp. 857-1292.
- Larson, H. K., Z. Jaafar & K. K. P. Lim, 2016. An updated checklist of the gobioid fishes of Singapore. *Raffles Bulletin of Zoology*. Supplement No. 34: 744-757.
- Lillywhite, H. B., 1998. Husbandry of the little file snake, *Acrochordus granulatus*. *Zoo Biology*. 15 (3): 315-327.
- Voris, H. K. & G. S. Glodek, 1980. Habitat, diet and reproduction of the file snake, *Acrochordus granulatus*, in the Straits of Malacca. *Journal of Herpetology*. 14 (1): 105-108.



Fig. 1. Snake locates entrance of burrow.



Fig. 2. Snake inserting its head into the burrow.



Fig. 3. Snake's tail entering another hole.



Fig. 4. Snake rotating its body.



Fig. 5. The snake's head and prey are pulled out of one hole while the tail is still in the other hole.



Fig. 6. Snake makes a loop in the water column.



Fig. 7. Snake falling on to the seabed.



Fig. 8. Coils being thrown around the head and prey.

Photographs and screen grabs from video by Stephen Beng



Fig. 9. Parts of the fish are visible. Note white underside, dark stripe and blackish spot at the caudal base.



Fig. 10. Snake starts to swallow the prey.



Fig. 11. Coils loosening around prey.



Fig. 12. Midsection of prey is visible between the coils.



Fig. 13. Prey is swallowed and snake uncoils itself.



Fig. 14. Snake 'yawning', possibly to realign jaws.

Photographs and screen grabs from video by Stephen Beng

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