

Oriental whip snakes mating

Naomi Kim

ureshikim@gmail.com

Subjects: Oriental whip snake, *Ahaetulla prasina* (Reptilia: Squamata: Colubridae).

Subjects identified by: Naomi Kim.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Kranji, Neo Tiew Crescent; 1 February 2020; 1440 hrs.

Habitat: Rural landscape. Secondary forest/scrub vegetation on the roadside.

Observer: Naomi Kim.

Observation: Three whip snakes were observed among the branches of a *Dillenia suffruticosa* tree at a side of the road. One of the snakes, being about 1.8 m in total length, was distinctly larger than the other two. They were draped over each other, and the snakes would occasionally twist about. Their intertwined tails suggest they were in the act of copulation (Fig. 1). As the observer was photographing the event, another conspecific snake descended from the branches above (Fig. 2) and joined in the mating aggregation. After about half-an-hour, the female left the site followed closely by her three suitors 'riding' on her back (Fig. 3).

Remarks: The Oriental whip snake is common in Singapore, and produces live young (see Baker & Lim, 2012: 93), but little seems to be known of its mating behaviour. The featured observation shows that it participates in mating aggregations where multiple males are attracted to one female and compete for the chance to mate with her. There was no biting among the participants and the event appears to be non-violent. The female is also the largest member in the featured event. It is not known if each of the males will get the opportunity to sire her offspring. A footage filmed in the wild in Singapore and featured in the television documentary 'Wild City – Forest Life', produced by Beach House Pictures in 2019 for MediaCorp (Singapore), depicts a similar mating behaviour involving several elegant bronzeback snakes (*Dendrelaphis formosus*).



Fig. 1. Mating aggregation of Oriental whip snakes. Note the entwined tails of all three snakes at the right side of the image. Photograph by Naomi Kim



Fig. 2. The third male (indicated by arrow) descending to join the mating aggregation.



Fig. 3. All four snakes leaving the site together. Note the three males 'riding' on the back of the female. The female's head is on the right outside the frame.

Photographs by Naomi Kim

Reference: Baker N & Lim K (2012) *Wild Animals of Singapore. A Photographic Guide to Mammals, Reptiles, Amphibians and Freshwater Fishes*. Updated edition. Draco Publishing & Distribution and Nature Society (Singapore). 180 pp.