

Biodiversity Record: Banded file snakes mating off Pasir Ris

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Subjects: Banded file snake, *Acrochordus granulatus* (Reptilia: Squamata: Acrochordidae).

Subjects identified by: Tan Heok Hui.

Location, date and time: Singapore, Johor Strait off east end of Pasir Ris Beach; 15 August 2021; 1115 hrs.

Habitat: Estuarine water channel. In open water about 50 m from the shoreline.

Observers: Iffah Iesa, Nuha Iesa, Fatin Iesa and Iskandar Ja'afar.

Observation: Two examples, each around 1 m in total length, were observed for around 15 minutes, floating and intertwined at the surface of the water and appearing to be mating. United at the tail region for the entire period of observation, they constantly furled and unfurled around each other. At times they were curled tightly together in a writhing sphere, while at other times, their bodies were in various stages of extension (Fig. 1). The snakes' heads broke the water surface in several instances. When they were almost free from each other, they extended vertically in the water column (Fig. 1C), but did not break contact. The writhing bodies were carried by the current eastwards along the beach, consistently visible on the surface, before drifting out of the observers' views.

Remarks: *Acrochordus granulatus* is an aquatic snake that frequents estuarine, marine, and even freshwater reservoirs on and around Singapore Island (Baker & Lim, 2012: 92; Teo & Khoo, 2016: 182). It has been recorded on the Singapore side of the Johor Strait, in the small patch of mangrove at Pasir Ris Park (Law, 2014; Thomas et al., 2014), and on sandy beach at Sembawang Park (Groenewoud, 2015: 40).

Copulation of *Acrochordus granulatus* appears to be rarely observed, but has been documented at least once before in Singapore. A picture in Ng (2012: 69), featuring two snakes exposed in shallow water on a coral reef flat apparently at Semakau Landfill, shows a small individual with its body wound tightly around the posterior section of a larger conspecific. Although not stated in the caption, it appears likely that the two snakes were mating. The featured observation shows a different scenario with snakes freely floating in considerably deeper water, fully exposed and appearing vulnerable to predation.

Literature cited:

Baker N & Lim KKP (2012) Wild Animals of Singapore: A Photographic Guide to Mammals, Reptiles, Amphibians and Freshwater Fishes. Updated Edition. Draco Publishing and Distribution Pte. Ltd., Singapore, 180 pp.

Groenewoud D (2015) Banded file snake at Sembawang Beach. Singapore Biodiversity Records, 2015: 40.

Law IS (2014) Banded file snakes at Pasir Ris mangroves. Singapore Biodiversity Records, 2014: 211.

Ng MFC (2012) Habitats in Harmony: The Story of Semakau Landfill. Second Edition. National Environment Agency, Singapore, 156 pp.

Teo J & Khoo MDY (2016) Smooth-coated otter interacting with banded file snake. Singapore Biodiversity Records, 2016: 182–184.

Thomas N, Barnett G & Zimny A (2014) Banded file snake at Pasir Ris mangroves. Singapore Biodiversity Records, 2014: 191.

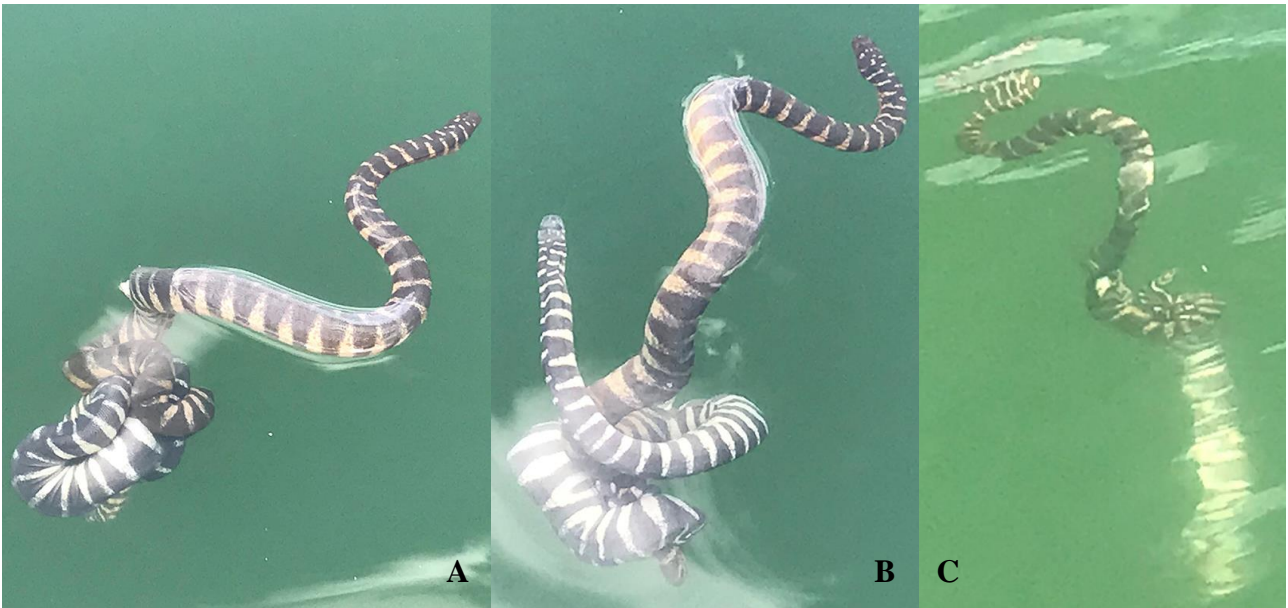


Fig. 1. Two banded file snakes intertwined and apparently engaged in copulation at the water surface, in situ off Pasir Ris Beach, Singapore. The gender of either snakes could not be determined. A, one snake floating and partially unfurled, the other tightly bundled around the posterior section of the former; B, the previously bundled up snake unwinding with the fore part of its body and its head free in the water; C, both snakes stretched out and fully submerged just below the water surface, with the previously floating individual vertically extended downwards in the water column, probably attempting to dive into the depths, but unable to do so as both snakes were still entwined at the tail region. (Photographs by: Iffah Iesa).