

Biodiversity Record: Close encounter with a black-headed collared snake and clouded monitor

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Recommended citation. Chin LN (2022) Biodiversity Record: Close encounter with a black-headed collared snake and clouded monitor. Nature in Singapore, 15: e2022065. DOI: 10.26107/NIS-2022-0065

Subjects: Black-headed collared snake, *Sibynophis melanocephalus* (Reptilia: Squamata: Colubridae); Clouded monitor, *Varanus nebulosus* (Reptilia: Squamata: Varanidae).

Subjects identified by: Benedict Yeap and Chin Liying Nikki.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Bukit Timah, Dairy Farm Nature Park; 18 April 2022; around 1117 hrs.

Habitat: Road adjacent to secondary forest and near a residential area.

Observer: Chin Liying Nikki.

Observation: A black-headed collared snake of about 60 cm was seen slithering across the road to a grass patch adjacent to a secondary forest (Fig. 1). A clouded monitor lizard of about 1 m total length was basking on the same grass patch no more than 60 cm away from the snake (Fig. 2) which it apparently saw, but did not react to it. It also tolerated the close proximity of the observer who was less than 2 m away. The snake poked its head out of the leaf litter (Fig. 3) and appeared to respond to the observer by gyrating its tail. It curled the end of its tail and made lateral undulating motions with the whole tail (Fig. 4).

Remarks: The observer finds the featured encounter interesting for not only is the black-headed collared snake an uncommon species in Singapore (see e.g., Baker & Lim, 2012; Lee, 2015; Subaraj, 2016), it did not appear to elicit a predatory response from a clouded monitor, and reacted to the observer's presence by undulating its tail. This behaviour seems to be an attempt to distract a potential predator from the snake's head by drawing its attention to the snake's rear end. It seems to be the first record of such a behaviour being exhibited by a *Sibynophis melanocephalus*.

Although the clouded monitor feeds primarily on invertebrates, it is known to eat snakes and other small vertebrates (Janssen & Sy, 2022). The featured lizard seemed to be habituated to humans as it was positioned in an exposed situation, and had allowed the observer to approach to within less than two metres of it without running away or showing defensive behaviour. However, this close proximity to a human could have prevented the lizard from attempting a strike at the snake, which was between it and the observer. As the monitor did not even react to the sight of the snake, it can also be implied that the lizard was simply not interested in the snake.

Literature cited:

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

Janssen J & Sy E (2022) A Naturalist's Guide to the Lizards of Southeast Asia. John Beaufoy Publishing, United Kingdom, 176 pp.

Lee HL (2015) Black-headed collared snake at Upper Peirce Reservoir Park. Singapore Biodiversity Records, 2015: 62.

Subaraj R (2016) Black-headed collared snakes at Mandai and Kranji. Singapore Biodiversity Records, 2016: 14.



Fig. 1. Black-headed collared snake slithering in the foreground towards the grass patch where the clouded monitor is resting. Fig. 2. The snake (arrowed) among leaf litter with clouded monitor in the background apparently not paying it any attention. Fig. 3. The snake (arrowed) emerging from the leaf litter. Fig. 4. Rear end of the snake with the tip of the tail curled (arrowed) and the tail undulating laterally. (Photographs by: Chin Liying Nikki).