

New record of the blackwater mud snake in Singapore

Subject: Blackwater mud snake, *Phytolopsis punctata* (Reptilia: Serpentes: Homalopsidae).

Subject identified by: Kelvin K. P. Lim.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Central Catchment Nature Reserve, Nee Soon swamp forest; 12 September 2014; morning.

Habitat: Freshwater swamp forest, in stream.

Observers: Li Tianjiao & Lim Weihao.

Observation: Two snakes of similar sizes were found in a fish trap set up for an on-going biodiversity survey. Although found on the morning of 12 September, they were presumed to have entered the trap the night before. An adult female of 37 cm snout-vent length and 41 cm total length (see accompanying picture) was kept as a voucher specimen in the Zoological Reference Collection of the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum at the National University of Singapore, under the catalogue number ZRC 2.7080. The other snake was released.

Remarks: This is the first record of *Phytolopsis punctata* in Singapore, and the fourth species of freshwater Homalopsid snake known from there. The others are *Enhydris enhydris* [rainbow mud snake], *Raclitia indica* [Selangor mud snake] and *Homalopsis buccata* [Puff-faced or Linne's water snake] (see Baker & Lim, 2012, *Raclitia indica* as *Enhydris indica*; Murphy & Voris, 2014).

The colour pattern and morphological characters of the specimen agree with the present definition of *Phytolopsis punctata*, even though it is suspected to consist of more than one species (Murphy, 2007: 160-163, as *Enhydris punctata*; Murphy & Voris, 2014: 32). The blackwater mud snake is known from Peninsular Malaysia, Sumatra and Borneo, where it seems to be associated with peat swamps and acidic blackwater (Murphy, 2007: 161, as *Enhydris punctata*).



Photograph by Noel Thomas

References:

- 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 and Distribution Pte. Ltd. and Nature Society (Singapore).180 pp.
- Murphy, J. C., 2007. *Homalopsid snakes: Evolution in the mud*. Krieger Publishing Company, Malabar, Florida, USA. 249 pp.
- Murphy, J. C. & H. K. Voris, 2014. A checklist and key to the Homalopsid snakes (Reptilia, Squamata, Serpentes), with description of new genera. *Fieldiana. Earth and Life Sciences*. No. 8, Publication 1567: 1-43.

Note: This discovery was made during a survey of the aquatic biodiversity of the Nee Soon swamp forest under the 'Nee Soon Swamp Forest Biodiversity and Hydrology Baseline Studies – Phase II' project jointly conducted by the National Parks Board and the National University of Singapore (Tropical Marine Science Institute, Department of Biological Sciences, Department of Geography and the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum).

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