

Interaction between two spotted keelback snakes

Subjects: Spotted keelback, *Xenochrophis maculatus* (Reptilia: Serpentes: Natricidae).

Subjects identified by: Contributor.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Upper Thomson, Venus Loop; 19 May 2015; 0945 hrs.

Habitat: Secondary forest. In sunny weather, after heavy rains on the previous day.

Observer: Contributor.

Observation: A single *Xenochrophis maculatus* was observed moving slowly through the leaf litter next to a stream. The snake then climbed up a shrub to around 1 m high, and remained still. After a photograph was taken of this snake, the observer left the site. When the observer returned to the site after five minutes, the keelback was moving through the leaf litter in the same spot as before. It again moved towards the same shrub as soon as it noticed the observer. Then, a second conspecific snake appeared on the scene (see photograph attached) and came into physical contact with the other snake. Through the dense vegetation that made observation difficult, the two individuals appeared to be ‘dancing’ for a few seconds. Thereafter, the two snakes separated and went their own ways, moving rather erratically and unpredictably. Although they remained in the vicinity for some time, each snake would occasionally move very slowly, and at other times, cover short distances rapidly. They were continuously climbing shrubs and moving through the leaf litter, and appeared aimless. The observer left the scene to avoid disturbing the snakes further.

Remarks: *Xenochrophis maculatus* is a rarely seen species that seems to be locally confined to the Bukit Timah and Central Catchment Nature Reserves (Baker & Lim, 2012: 114). It is not known if the observed interaction of the two snakes represents courting behavior, or one of rivalry. If the snakes were courting, the difference in colour on their necks (see attached picture) could indicate sexual dimorphism.

Reference: 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).



The two spotted keelbacks about to come into physical contact. Arrows indicate position of the snakes’ heads. Note that the individual on the left has a dull greyish neck, while the other one has a bright yellow neck. Photograph by David Groenewoud

Contributor: David Groenewoud
Contact address: davidgroenewoud@hotmail.com