

Biodiversity Record: Predation of banded Malayan coral snake by blue Malayan coral snake

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Subjects: Blue Malayan coral snake, *Calliophis bivirgatus* (Reptilia: Squamata: Elapidae);
Banded Malayan coral snake, *Calliophis intestinalis* (Reptilia: Squamata: Elapidae).

Subjects identified by: Yon-lu Goh.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Thomson Nature Park; 22 May 2024; 1445–1550 hrs.

Habitat: Secondary forest. On leaf litter of forest floor next to a trail.

Observers: Yon-lu Goh and Rovena Chow.

Observation: A blue Malayan coral snake of about 130 cm total length was observed crawling amongst the damp leaf litter. It had explored an area of about 6 square metres, constantly inserting its head into the leaf litter, apparently foraging. On multiple occasions, it stopped to stretch or readjust its jaws (Fig. 1). After about an hour, the blue coral snake paused. It had stopped above a banded Malayan coral snake on the leaf litter. The blue coral snake bit the banded coral snake on the head, pulled on it, and proceeded to swallow the other snake whole (Figs. 2–4). The banded coral snake, estimated to be about 50 cm in total length, did not appear to twitch or struggle as it was being consumed in under two minutes.

A video of the predation event recorded by Yon-lu Goh can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/r-yfE4ecNF8>.



Fig. 1. Prior to the predation event, the blue Malayan coral snake was observed on multiple occasions to be stretching or readjusting its jaws while remaining stationary (Photograph by: Yon-lu Goh).



Fig 2 & 3. Fronto-lateral view of the head of the blue Malayan coral snake in the process of swallowing the banded Malayan coral snake. The latter has a distinctive black and red tail. Fig 4. Closeup of the blue coral snake almost done with swallowing the banded coral snake (Photographs by: Yon-lu Goh).

Remarks: The blue Malayan coral snake and banded Malayan coral snake are both venomous (see Baker & Lim, 2012). Both are known to feed on other snakes, including venomous ones. Surprisingly, the banded coral snake did not struggle while it was being pulled by the blue Malayan coral snake, and being swallowed at the same time. This is in contrast to other observations of snake predation where the prey did put up some amount of resistance (see Mejia, 2014; Koh, 2020; Kamalakannan, 2023). A possible reason is that the banded coral snake in this event was already dead when the blue coral snake started consuming it.

The author believes that the blue coral snake could have bitten and envenomated the banded coral snake earlier. The biting could have taken place before observation, or it could have occurred during one of the times when the blue coral snake poked its head into the leaf litter. This may be an explanation for the occasional stretching and realignment of the jaws of the blue coral snake. The banded coral snake could have broken free and escaped after it was bitten. When found by the blue coral snake, it had become completely immobilized by the venom, and thus did not put up a fight, or had already died.

Literature cited:

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