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Biodiversity Record: Raffles' banded langur dies apparently from snake bite

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Subject: Raffles' banded langur, *Presbytis femoralis* (Mammalia: Primates: Cercopithecidae).

Subject identified by: Andie Ang.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Old Upper Thomson Road; 22 May 2024; 0900 hrs.

Habitat: Road flanked by mature secondary forest. On grassy verge next to open concrete drain.

Observers: Andie Ang, Jia Bao Law, Nicholas Lo, Edwin Teo, Jeff Teo and Then Chih Wey.

Observation: An adult male langur was discovered dead, with fresh blood covering his face. Given the close proximity to the road, he was initially suspected to have been hit by a motor vehicle. The langur was brought to Mandai Wildlife Group for a post-mortem examination. He weighed about 6.5 kg. No obvious fracture was palpable. After clipping the fur on the body, two tiny sharp bite marks about 1 cm apart were revealed on the right ventral mandible, with the tissue underneath showing extensive hemorrhage. Another set of similar bite marks and hemorrhage were noted on the right elbow. Under dissection, severe hemorrhages were also noted around the sternum and in multiple organs such as the spleen.

Fig. 1. In-situ view of the dead langur lying on his back on the grass verge next to the drain at Old Upper Thomson Road. (Photograph by: Edwin Teo). Fig. 2. Ventral aspect of the langur's head showing a 1-cm wide bite mark on the right mandible. Arrows indicate positions of fang puncture wounds. (Photograph by: Chia Da-Hsu)

Remarks: Raffles' banded langurs are arboreal animals (Ang & Jabbar, 2022). Two sets of bite marks on the body of the featured individual suggest that he was likely attacked by a highly venomous snake that also climbs trees and rests on branches. Two possible candidates in Singapore are the Sunda king cobra (*Ophiophagus bungarus*) and Wagler's pit viper (*Tropidolaemus wagleri*) (see Law et al., 2025).

It appeared that the langur was bitten at least twice, once on the right mandible and once on the right elbow. The hemorrhage on the back indicated that the monkey fell after he was bitten. The cause of death was due to suspected (as venom-testing was not conducted) venom-induced disseminated intravascular coagulopathy, which led to abnormal blood clotting throughout the bloodstream and hemorrhage in multiple organs.

While the immediate cause of death was the impact from a fall, the snake bite may be the underlying cause. The venom — whether neurotoxic, causing sudden paralysis and loss of grip, or hemotoxic, causing rapid weakness and circulatory failure — compromised the langur's ability to navigate the canopy, may have triggered his fall. The fresh blood on his face was mostly due to the fall.

Reports of non-human primate predation by snakes are rare as they generally exhibit strong innate fear and avoidance of snakes (Isbell, 2006). Nevertheless, there are documented cases of snakes biting and killing wild primates (see Headland & Greene, 2011), including in Kenya where a Stuhlmann's blue monkey (*Cercopithecus mitis stuhlmanni*) died following a bite by a Gaboon viper (*Bitis gabonica*) and a Zanzibar Sykes monkey (*Cercopithecus mitis albogularis*) died after suffering symptoms that are characteristic of bites inflicted by black mambas (*Dendroaspis polylepis*) (see Foerster, 2008).

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