

A spotted keelback at MacRitchie forest

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Subject: Spotted keelback, *Xenochrophis maculatus* (Reptilia: Squamata: Natricidae).

Subject identified by: Author.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Central Catchment Nature Reserve, MacRitchie forest, slope before entrance of Treetop Walk; 6 December 2017; 1010 hrs.

Habitat: Secondary lowland rainforest, by a metalled road.

Observer: Author.

Observation: An example of 60-70 cm total length was first seen by the kerb of the road on the forested side. It moved onto a log (Fig. 1) where it stayed for around 5 minutes before slithering further into the forest.



Fig. 1. Lateral view of the anterior two-third of the snake on a log. Photograph by James Chua

Remarks: In Singapore, the spotted keelback appears to be restricted to the Bukit Timah and Central Catchment Nature Reserves and is regarded as ‘uncommon’ (Baker & Lim, 2012: 114, 161). There are two earlier records at the edge of the forest from the Venus Drive area (Ng, 2014: 20; Groenewoud, 2015: 90).

The upper labials and neck area of the featured subject is bright yellow (Fig. 2). Some individuals have white upper labials and neck (see Ng, 2014: 20 and illustration in Baker & Lim, 2012: 114). Although no mention is made regarding the colour of the throat and ventral part of the neck, the upper labials is known to be white or yellow (Tweedie, 1983: 92 as *Macropophis maculatus*; Baker & Lim, 2012: 114), or yellow (Das, 2010: 343).

The illustration of *Xenochrophis maculatus* in Baker & Lim (2012: 114) shows a snake with whitish upper labials. A snake photographed attacking the rear end of a four-lined tree frog (*Polypedates leucomystax*) by Tan & Chew (1992: 50 as *Macropophis maculatus*) has yellow upper labials. Two physically interacting examples observed at Venus Loop in May 2015 by Groenewoud (2015: 90) show different colouration on the upper labials and neck. One is yellow, and the other is white. Although this colour difference may indicate sexual dichromatism, it is yet to be proven.



Fig. 2. Side view of the head and neck of the snake showing the bright yellow throat and neck. Photograph by James Chua

References:

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- Tan W. K. & Y. F. Chew, 1992. *Naturally Yours, Singapore*. National Parks Board, Singapore. 99 pp.
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