

Records of striped keelback from eastern Singapore

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Subjects: Striped keelback, *Xenochrophis vittatus* (Reptilia: Squamata: Colubridae: Natricinae).

Subjects identified by: Alex Figueroa.

Locations, dates and time: Records from two localities on Singapore Island:

1. East Coast Park, beach near Parkland Green; 16 June 2018; 1842 hrs.
2. Pasir Ris Park mangroves, off boardwalk; 11 September 2018; 2224 hrs.

Habitats: Sandy beach flanked by urban parkland at East Coast Park. Mangrove at Pasir Ris Park.

Observers: Sim Choon Heok at East Coast Park. Alex Figueroa and Jason Fantuzzi at Pasir Ris Park.

Observations:

1. An individual of about 45 cm total length was first seen moving along the beach (Fig. 1), and when it was approached, the snake entered the sea. After noticing the snake was having difficulty swimming against the tides, a stick was used to carry the snake out of the water and move it to a tree along the beach.
2. One individual of about 50 cm total length was observed loosely coiled on a *Achrostichum speciosum* (Fig. 2).

Remarks: *Xenochrophis vittatus* is a non-native snake in Singapore. It naturally occurs in Bangka, Java, Sumatra, and Weh Islands in Indonesia (Wallach et al., 2014: 154). The species is believed to have reached Singapore as a stowaway and was first recorded in July 1982 at Pandan Gardens (Lim & Lim, 1988: 85). In the same article, Lim & Lim (1988: 85) also reported one found in a drain near Jurong Junior College in June 1984, and another which was killed after it bit someone at an unknown location on 2 October 1988. Due to these sightings spanning from 1982 to 1988, Lim & Lim (1988: 86) considered *Xenochrophis vittatus* already established in Singapore.

Since then, the striped keelback has been reported numerous times, predominantly from the western side of Singapore Island, such as Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve (Lim and Lim, 1989: 3), Jalan Bahtera (Chan, 2015: 55), Jalan Ulu Sembawang, Kranji Reservoir Park, Lim Chu Kang Road, Neo Tiew Lane, Sungei Tengah Road (Lim, 1991: 3), and Upper Bukit Timah Road (Lim & Subaraj, 1994: 6). More recent records originated from north-eastern Singapore and offshore. The first is of a juvenile sighted at Pulau Ubin on 2 August 2013 (Fung & Chan, 2014: 108). The size class of this individual suggests a breeding population on Pulau Ubin. The second observation was of a dead individual seen in the bill of a white-throated kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) at Pasir Ris Park on 25 August 2018 (Morgany, 2018: 119).

The two records featured here establish the presence of *Xenochrophis vittatus* in Pasir Ris, and extend its distribution to south-eastern Singapore. Evidently, the striped keelback has established itself throughout Singapore Island and Pulau Ubin. An inhabitant of open areas, paddy fields and gardens (de Lang, 2017: 223), the present records also indicate opportunistic habitat use of beach and mangrove.

References:

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Fig. 1. Striped keelback on the beach and moving towards the sea at East Coast Park. Photograph by Sim Choon Heok



Fig. 2. An adult striped keelback loosely coiled on *Achrostichum speciosum* at Pasir Ris. Photograph by Alex Figueroa