



# A King Cobra, *Ophiophagus hannah* (Cantor 1836), Preying on a Green Pitviper (*Trimeresurus* sp.) in Nepal

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The King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*), the longest venomous snake in the world (total length to 5.85 m; Chanhome et al. 2011), is widely distributed throughout southern and southeastern Asia and has been reported from Bali, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Borneo, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Java, Laos, Macao, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, Sulawesi, Sumatra, Thailand, and Vietnam (David and Vogel 1996; Scleich and Kästle 2002), where it occurs in a variety of habitats including pristine forests, degraded forests, mangrove swamps, agricultural areas, and non-forested lands (Stuart et al. 2012). In Nepal, King Cobras have been recorded at elevations of 110 to 2,566 m throughout the Terai in the southern part of the country (Shah 2000; Thapa et al. 2019). As the generic name indicates, King Cobras feed primarily on snakes (e.g., Bhaisare et al. 2010; Tan et al. 2015).

At 1523 h on 11 February 2015, we encountered a King Cobra swallowing a green pitviper (*Trimeresurus* sp.) (Fig. 1) in Pokhara, Ward No.-18 (former Sarangkot Village Development Committee), Gandaki Province, Nepal, at an elevation of 1,443

m (28.2421172°N, 83.9481137°E). Complete ingestion from the time of the initial observation, when the cobra had swallowed about half of the pitviper, took 4 min 25 sec.

Two species of green pitvipers, the White-lipped Pitviper (*Trimeresurus albolabris*) and the Himalayan White-lipped Pitviper (*T. septentrionalis*) are known to occur in this area and three other species (*T. erythrurus*, *T. gramineus*, and *T. yunnanensis*) have been reported although the records are insufficiently documented (Sharma et al. 2013). We were unable to determine the species of the pitviper, but assume it was either *T. albolabris* or *T. septentrionalis*.

King Cobras are known to feed on pitvipers (e.g., Bhaisare et al. 2010). Nevertheless, this observation is of interest due to the near-urban setting in which the predation event occurred, the fact that a number of local residents gathered but heeded our advice not to disturb the snake (King Cobras are routinely persecuted throughout their range; e.g., Marshall et al. 2018), and that we had an opportunity to explain the importance of King Cobras and their role in controlling another venomous snake, which helps reduce the frequency of human snakebites.



**Fig. 1.** A King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*) ingesting a green pitviper (*Trimeresurus* sp.) in Pokhara, Gandaki Province, Nepal. Photograph by Rishi Baral.

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