



Death-feigning and Defensive Behavior in Two Snakes of the Andaman and Nicobar Archipelago of India

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Defensive behaviors used by animals to avoid predation include flight, crypsis, and death-feigning (thanatosis), with the latter known to occur in some species of fishes (e.g., Mckaye 1981; Howe 1991), birds (e.g., Sargent and Eberhardt 1975), mammals (e.g., Francq 1969), and many reptiles (summarised in Patel et al. 2016 and Deshmukh et al. 2020). Herein I describe two instances in two species of snakes from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Although Vijayakumar and David (2006) recorded new records of the Nicobar Kukri Snake (*Oligodon woodmasoni*) from islands in the Nicobar Archipelago, little is known about the behavior and natural history of this species. During herpetological surveys on Camorta, which is in the central group of the Nicobar Archipelago, I observed an adult female mov-

ing actively at about 2100 h on the trunk of a tree at a height of about 2 m above the ground at Changua (08.0157°N, 93.4995°E; 188.4 m asl). While being photographed (Fig. 1), the snake coiled its body tightly and hid its head within the coils, remaining motionless for about 2 min. It subsequently curled its tail above its body, presumably in an effort to distract a putative predator. Such tail-curling behavior has been reported by David et al. (2012) and Seshadri (2014) in several congeners (*O. albocinctus*, *O. cyclurus*, *O. nago*, and *O. octolineatus*). The snake then twisted its body coils, exposing its venter, and feigned death. This the first report of such behavior by *Oligodon woodmasoni* and is also the first record of the species from Camorta.

When approached, an adult female Tytler's Keelback (*Fowlea tytleri*) (SVL ~1,000 mm) that had been rescued from the hostel in Port Blair, South Andaman (11.6339°N, 92.7424°E; 75 m asl) inverted its body, exposed its venter, and feigned death (Fig. 2). After being left undisturbed for one minute, it slowly raised its head, presumably checking if the threat had passed, before assuming a natural position. Vogel and Han-Yuen (2010) described death-feigning behavior in a congener, the Checkered Keelback (*Fowlea piscator*).

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Fig. 1. Defensive behaviors of a Nicobar Kukri Snake (*Oligodon woodmasoni*): tail-curling (A), head-hiding (B), and death-feigning (C). Photographs by S.R. Chandramouli.

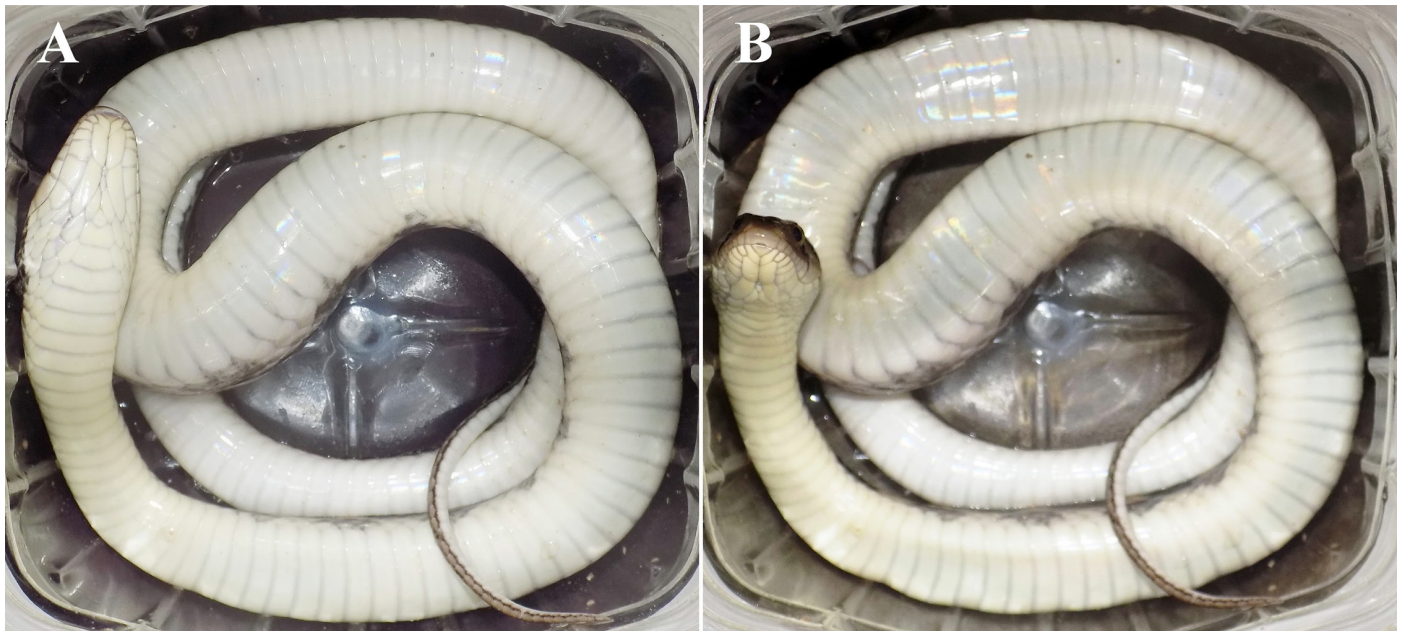


Fig. 2. Death-feigning behavior in Tytler's Keelback (*Fowlea tyleri*) (A) and checking for threats after a period of one minute (B). Photographs by S.R. Chandramouli.

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