



# Death-feigning Behavior by Copper-headed Trinket Snakes, *Coelognathus radiatus* (Boie 1827) (Squamata: Colubridae), in Nepal

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Photographs by the senior author.

Death-feigning (also known as thanatosis or tonic immobility) by snakes is a form of defensive behavior in which a snake acts as if it were dead in response to a predator when threatened or physically touched (e.g., Gregory et al. 2007). Bhattarai et al. (2017) reported this behavior in the Burmese Python (*Python bivittatus*) from Chitwan National Park, Nepal, the only previous report of death-feigning by a Nepalese snake. Vogel and Yuen (2010) and Nadolski et al. (2020) reported the death-feigning behavior in Copper-headed Trinket Snakes (*Coelognathus radiatus*) from elsewhere in the species' range.

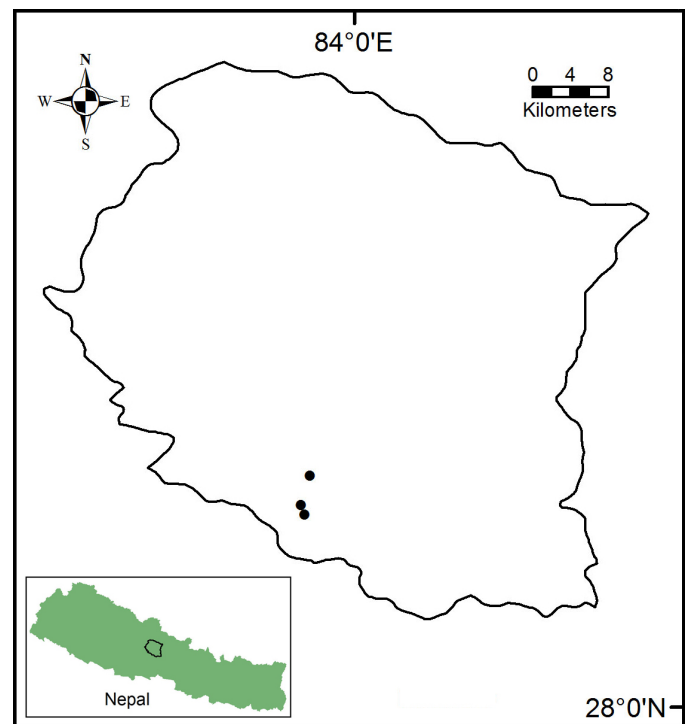
Copper-headed Trinket Snakes are widely distributed throughout southeastern Asia (e.g., Shah and Tiwari 2004; Whitaker and Captain 2004). When threatened, these snakes may flatten the forebody, assume an S-shaped posture, elevate off the ground, gape, hiss, strike, and feign death (Whitaker and Captain 2004; Vogel and Yuen 2010; Nadolski et al. 2020). Herein, we describe for the first time death-feigning behavior by Copper-headed Trinket Snakes from Nepal.

In 2019 and 2020, during rescue and release operations in Pokhara, Kaski (Fig. 1), we observed three instances of death-feigning by Copper-headed Trinket Snakes. The first episode was at 1240 h on 10 June 2019 in Siddhartha Rajmarga, (28°11'34.52"N, 83°56'55.76"E; elev. 816 m asl). When released onto the ground, the snake stopped moving, inverted its body, and feigned death with its mouth closed (Fig. 2). After approximately 10 sec, it righted itself and began moving slowly while tongue-flicking. Apparently disturbed when we tried to take photographs from a closer distance, it rolled over again and feigned death with its mouth partially open. It repeated similar sequences a total of six times before moving into adjacent natural habitat.

The second case was at about 1100 h on 22 September 2019 in Khahare, Lakeside (28°13'16.46"N, 83°57'26.16"E;

808 m asl). When rescue team members kept their distance, the snake tried to escape but, when handled, the snake feigned death (Fig. 3). After being placed on the ground, the snake maintained thanatosis for about 20 sec before assuming a normal position and attempting to escape. As soon as a team member approached it, it again feigned death after regurgitating a mouse. It continued to feign death while it was bagged.

The third episode (Fig. 4) was at 0743 h on 4 March 2020 at the Furse Khola Bridge, Chhorepatan (28°11'02.89"N,



**Fig. 1.** Map of the Kaski District in Nepal. Dots denote the localities in Pokhara where we observed Copper-headed Trinket Snakes (*Coelognathus radiatus*) exhibiting death-feigning behavior.



**Fig. 2.** A Copper-headed Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus radiatus*) death-feigning with mouth closed (left) and partially open (right).



**Fig. 3.** A Copper-headed Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus radiatus*) feigning death when handled by a rescue team member (left), when placed on the ground (center), and after regurgitating a mouse (right).



**Fig. 4.** This Copper-headed Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus radiatus*) assumed an elevated S-shaped posture and gaped prior to feigning death.

83°57'7.55"E; 747 m asl). While being released, this snake elevated its head, gaped, and assumed an S-shaped posture (Fig. 4) but subsequently became motionless with the mouth

slightly open. Unlike the snakes described previously, this individual feigned death only once.

#### Acknowledgements

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