

## Climbing Behavior in a Checkered Keelback, Xenochrophis piscator (Schneider 1799), in Central India

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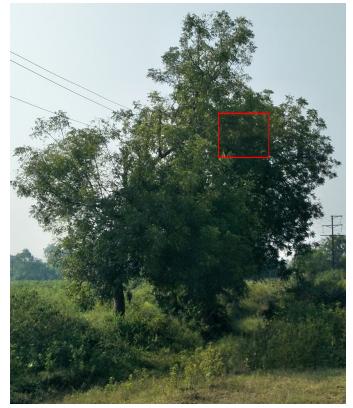
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Photographs by Sagar A. Deshmukh.

The Checkered Keelback or Asiatic Watersnake (Xenochrophis piscator) is perhaps the most plentiful snake in India (Whitaker and Captain 2005), and is particularly abundant in central India (Nande and Deshmukh 2007; Deshmukh et al. 2015). This snake can be found in and around bodies of fresh water, including rivers, ponds, impoundments, and paddy fields. Xenochrophis piscator is a strong swimmer and diver and is capable of jumping off the ground (Daniel 2002). It feeds on frog eggs, tadpoles, and adults, and occasionally fish, rodents, and birds (Whitaker and Captain 2005). Herein we record unusual climbing behavior in an aquatic snake. Phansalkar and Gowande (2017) documented a Checkered Keelback climbing a tree in a semi-evergreen forest in the northern Western Ghats, but climbing is an unusual and unexpected behavior for an aquatic snake.



**Fig. 1.** An adult Checkered Keelback (*Xenochrophis piscator*) in an Indian Neem Tree (*Azadirachta indica*).



**Fig. 2.** The red rectangle indicates the location of the Checkered Keelback (*Xenochrophis piscator*) about 4 m above the ground in an Indian Neem Tree (*Azadirachta indica*).

At 0720 hours on 15 October 2017 near Khadak Nala, Kalmeshwar, Nagpur, Maharashtra, in central India (21°14′58″N, 78°53′67″E; elev. 333.1 m), we found an unsexed adult *Xenochrophis piscator* (total length ~1,100 mm) perched about 7 m above the ground in an Indian Neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*; Figs. 1 & 2). Although two Oriental

Garden Lizards (*Calotes versicolor* complex) we saw in the same tree might have been potential prey, these snakes are not known to hunt lizards. Ample cover and suitable basking sites were available in the vicinity, so we are unable to explain why this snake or that observed by Phansalkar and Gowande (2017) climbed a tree.

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