



Consumption of Shed Skin and Scavenging Behavior by Common Indian Trinket Snakes, *Coelognathus helena helena* (Daudin 1803)

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The Common Indian Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus helena helena*) is one of the most frequently encountered snakes in India. The species is widely distributed throughout India and also occurs in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka (Whitaker and Captain 2004). Typical prey consists of small mammals, lizards, snakes, and frogs (Whitaker and Captain 2004). Herein we report consumption of a shed snake skin and an instance of scavenging behavior.

At 2025 h on 15 July 2018, we rescued an adult Common Indian Trinket Snake near Tel Ghani, Kalmeshwar, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India (21°14'08"N, 78°54'34.7"E). During the rescue, we noticed that the snake was ingesting a recently shed molt of an unidentified snake (Fig. 1). The snake took about

6 min to ingest the skin. We released the snake into appropriate habitat in the outskirts of the city.

At 2255 h on 5 August 2018, during a survey along the Kalmeshwar-to-Saoner road near the Chandrabhaga River, Maharashtra, India (21°28'69.42"N, 78°91'44.51"E), we encountered a road-killed Common Indian Trinket Snake (total length 960.25 mm; Fig. 2) with a piece of chicken (approximately 50.8 mm in diameter), such as that used in chicken biryani, in its mouth. A plastic bag containing scraps of biryani, plastic plates, boiled rice, and paper was nearby. The improper disposal of food waste on or along roads might attract mammals, birds, and, in this instance, a snake, exposing them to vehicular mortality.

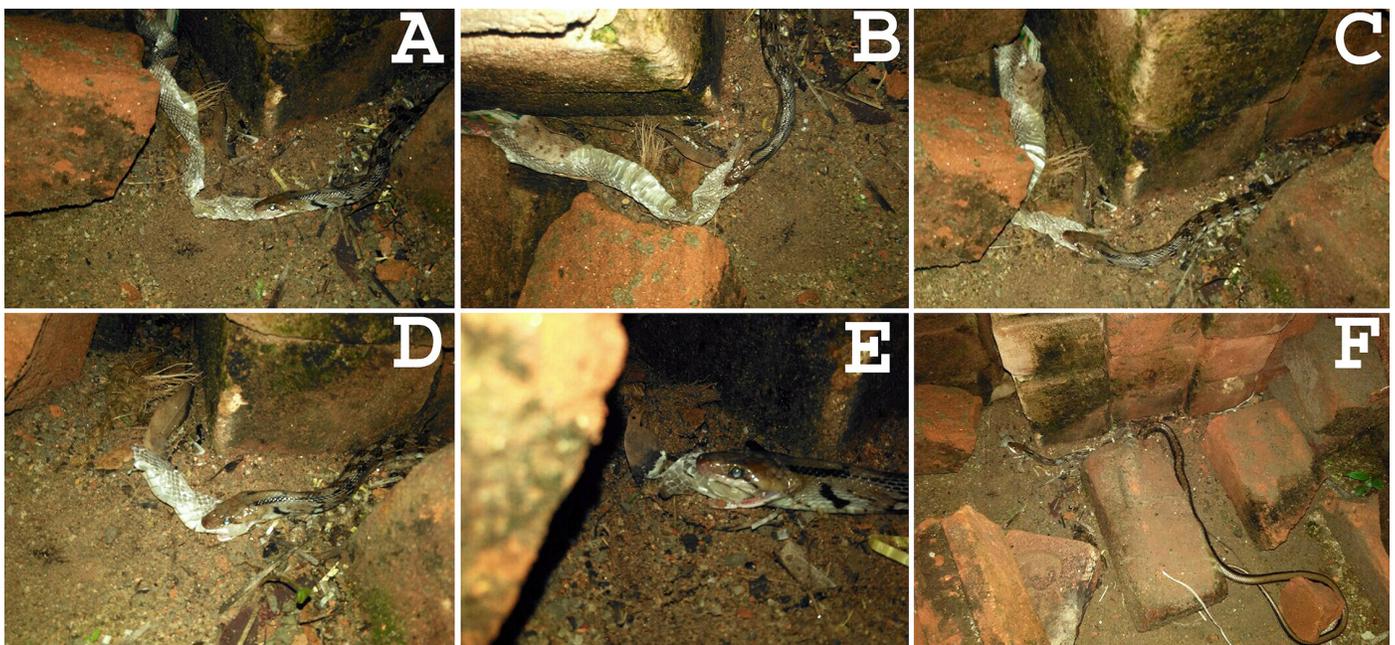


Fig. 1. An adult Common Indian Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus helena helena*) ingesting a recently shed molt of an unidentified snake. Photographs by Rahul V. Deshmukh.



Fig. 2. A road-killed Common Indian Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus helena helena*) with a discarded piece of chicken in its mouth. The plastic bag visible in the second image contained pieces of chicken biryani, plastic plates, boiled rice, and paper. Photographs by Rahul V. Deshmukh.

Ayres (2012), who reported scavenging by snakes in the genus *Natrix*, suggested that such behavior in snakes might be more common than previously thought, often overlooked, or simply not observed. Lillywhite et al. (2002, 2008) recorded scavenging by Florida Cottonmouths (*Agkistrodon conanti*) at island bird rookeries and in an intertidal zone, respectively. Shivik and Clark (2012) noted that snakes, such as the Brown Treesnake (*Boiga irregularis*), that use chemical cues to find food appear to scavenge more frequently than those relying on visual or thermal cues. Sharma et al. (2016) reported the consumption of inanimate objects by an Oriental Ratsnake (*Ptyas mucosa*) using chemical cues. Mohopatra (2011) and Deshmukh et al. (2016) reported scavenging behavior in Common Indian Kraits (*Bungarus caeruleus*), and Deshmukh et al. (2017) documented consumption of a plastic bag that had contained food by another Common Indian Krait.

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