



# Attempted Autophagy in a Checkered Keelback, *Fowlea piscator* (Schneider 1799) (Natricidae) from India

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The Checkered Keelback or Asiatic Watersnake (*Fowlea piscator*) is among the most frequently encountered aquatic snakes and possibly the most plentiful species of snake in India (Whitaker and Captain 2005). It inhabits the whole of India to Baluchistan and the northwestern frontier provinces and extends into the Indo-Chinese region as far east as Myitkina in upper Burma (Smith 1943). It is very common in central India (Nande and Deshmukh 2007; Deshmukh et al. 2015), where it occurs in and around rivers, ponds, and paddy fields. Extremely active, these snakes are capable

of jumping off the ground, and in water they swim nimbly and are capable divers (Daniel 2002). They feed on frog eggs, tadpoles, frogs, fish, and occasionally on rodents and birds (Whitaker and Captain 2005). Herein we record an unusual attempt of self-cannibalism or autophagous behavior.

We rescued a gravid adult female Checkered Keelback (~1,120 mm total length) at 0845 h on 5 August 2019 in a seasonal pond near Buddha Vihar, Mahajanwadi, Hingana, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India (21°08'78.18"N, 78°97'78.18"E) and placed it in a clean transparent plastic jar. The snake was



**Fig. 1.** An apparent attempt at autophagy by a Checkered Keelback (*Fowlea piscator*) in India. Photograph by Rahul V. Deshmukh.

very aggressive when rescued and continued to strike repeatedly in the container. At 1000 h the next morning, Sanjay Wasake found the snake dead while biting its own tail (Fig. 1).

Autophagy has been occasionally observed in snakes but is rarely documented (Mitchell et al. 1982; Rossi and Rossi 2002; Mattison 2007). Carlino and Pauwels (2015) attributed such behavior to stress generated by captivity, which appeared to be the case in this instance as well.

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