



Notes on the Diet and Feeding Behavior of the Khumhzi Striped Ichthyophis, *Ichthyophis khumhzi* Kamei, Wilkinson, Gower, and Biju 2009 (Amphibia: Gymnophiona: Ichthyophiidae), from Mizoram in Northeastern India

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Caecilians in the genus *Ichthyophis* are known to be generalist predators (Wilkinson 2012) that are reported to feed mainly on ants, termites, and earthworms (Measey et al. 2004). They also occasionally feed on centipedes, antlions, thrips, slugs, and dipteran larvae (Gaborieau and Measey 2004); but rarely on snakes (Greeff 1884; Presswell et al. 2002), lizards (Moll and Smith 1967), anuran tadpoles (Verdade et al. 2000), frogs (Prigioni and Langone 1983), and small fishes (Lancini 1969). In addition, Venu et al. (2016) documented *I. cf. bombayensis* preying on another caecilian, *Gegeneophis goaensis*.

The Khumhzi Striped Ichthyophis (*Ichthyophis khumhzi*) is presently known from the type locality at Khumhzi Village, Manipur (Kamei et al. 2009) and the Siaha District in Mizoram (Chaitanya et al. 2017) in northeastern India. Little is known about the life history of this species. Herein we report on the diet and feeding behavior of an individual (SVL = 438.7 mm) collected by Ro Malsawma on 3 July 2020 at Mission Vengthlang, Aizawl, Mizoram, India (23.712530°, 92.708129°; WGS 84; elev. 940 m asl).

At about 1520 h on 2 September 2020, while photographing a live Garo Hills Caecilian (*Ichthyophis garoensis*) and an *I. khumhzi* near the Department of Zoology building on the Mizoram University campus, an earthworm (*Eutyphoeus* sp.) (approx. 160 mm total length) was collected nearby in the vicinity of a banana plantation. The earthworm was offered initially to the *I. garoensis*, which did not respond to its presence. However, as soon as the earthworm moved close to the caecilian, the latter quickly grabbed the worm's

posterior and swallowed it (Fig. 1). The elapsed time from snatching to complete ingestion was ca. 4 min. A small twig inadvertently taken with the worm adhered to the caecilian's mouth but was effectively removed by rubbing its jaws on the ground (Fig. 2). The caecilian is being kept alive in the Developmental Biology and Herpetology laboratory at Mizoram University for further studies.

Four species of caecilians in the genus *Ichthyophis* have been reported from Mizoram. Chaitanya et al. (2017) documented the presence of *I. moustakius* and *I. khumhzi* and Malsawmhriatzuali et al. (2020) noted the occurrence of *I. garoensis* and *I. sendenyu* in the state. At present, little is known about the biology and behavior of any of the four species (Ahmed et al. 2009; Kamei et al. 2009), which probably is attributable to their fossorial habits (Taylor 1968). Ahmed et al. (2009) listed earthworms and probably other soft-bodied invertebrates in the diet of *I. garoensis*, the only species for which any record of diet existed until the observation described herein.

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Fig. 1. A Khumhzi Striped Ichthyophis (*Ichthyophis khumbzi*) feeding on an earthworm (*Eutyphoeus* sp.) in Mizoram, India. Photographs by Tbc Lalhruaitluangi.



Fig. 2. A Khumhzi Striped Ichthyophis (*Ichthyophis khumbzi*) rubbing its jaws on the ground in an effort to remove a twig caught in its mouth. Photographs by Ro Malsawma.

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