



Unusual Feeding Behavior by a Spectacled Cobra, *Naja naja* (Linnaeus 1785) in India

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Snakes typically are carnivorous with various species consuming a variety of invertebrate and vertebrate prey, often in accordance with size of predator and prey (Greene 1997). However, instances of herbivory, consumption of inanimate objects, and scavenging have been reported. D’Abreu (1911) speculated that the presence of stones in the stomach of a Checkered Keelback (*Fowlea piscator*) might serve a purpose similar to that of stones consumed by crocodiles and birds. Dalziel (1937) recorded a snake feeding on fruits under a *Vitex micrantha*, a tropical African tree. Mookerjee (1946) described an Indian Rock Python (*Python molurus*) that had ingested four Mango (*Mangifera* sp.) fruits infested with insect larvae. Irvine (1953) reported snakes feeding on the yellow fruits of *Memordica foetida*, a perennial African vine. Engel (1997) described consumption of fruits (*Diospyros consolatae*) by a Black-necked Spitting Cobra (*Naja nigricollis*) and suggested that this might facilitate seed dispersal. Lilywhite et al. (2008) mentioned the consumption of marine

plants by Florida Cottonmouths (*Agkistrodon conanti*). Sharma et al. (2016) reported instances of Oriental Ratsnakes (*Ptyas mucosa*) feeding on an onion and consuming a piece of cloth. Deshmukh et al. (2017) documented a plastic bag consumed by a Common Indian Krait (*Bungarus caeruleus*) and Deshmukh et al. (2018) described consumption of shed skin by a Common Indian Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus helena helena*). Herein we report unusual feeding behavior by an Indian Spectacled Cobra (*Naja naja*). Indian Spectacled Cobras are distributed throughout mainland India (excluding the northeast) as well as in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan (Smith 1943; Whitaker and Captain 2004). These snakes are active by day and night and feed largely on rodents, frogs, birds, and snakes (Whitaker and Captain 2004).

At 0800 h on 29 April 2020 in an agricultural field near the Holiday Restaurant in the vicinity of Chicholi, Madhya Pradesh, India (21.498774°N, 78.705293°E), we observed an adult female Spectacled Cobra (TL 1,150 mm) that had



Fig. 1. An adult female Spectacled Cobra (*Naja naja*) ingesting fruits of an Eggplant (*Solanum melongena*, known in India as brinjal) in an agricultural field near the Holiday Restaurant in the vicinity of Chicholi, Madhya Pradesh, India. Note the presence of a previously swallowed fruit indicated by the red arrow. Photographs by Rahul V. Deshmukh.

ingested the fruit of an Eggplant (*Solanum melongena*, known in India as brinjal) with an approximate diameter of 50 mm and was in the process of eating another of about the same size (Fig. 1). The snake swallowed both eggplants without difficulty. She regurgitated one eggplant and moved into vegetation alongside the agricultural field when disturbed by observers; however, she later returned to ingest the regurgitated fruit. Earlier reports (Mookerjee 1946; Sharma et al. 2016) documented consumption of plant material that either was rotten or infested with insect larvae. In the present case, the eggplant fruit was already rotten and its foul odor might have attracted the snake.

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