



Observations of Feeding Behavior and a Note on Clutch Size in Wall’s Keelback, *Herpetoreas xenura* (Wall 1907) (Squamata: Natricidae)

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Wall’s Keelback (*Herpetoreas xenura*) ranges from north-eastern India (Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram) south into Bangladesh and Myanmar (Whitaker and Captain 2008; Das 2018; Uetz et al. 2020). Nothing is known about the diet and reproduction of this species. Herein we document two instances of predation and provide information on clutch and egg size.

At 2145 h on 27 July 2020, we encountered a female *Herpetoreas xenura* (SVL 467 mm) feeding on a female Assam Forest Frog (*Hydrophylax leptoglossa*) (total length 263 mm) on the edge of a pool surrounded by secondary forest used as a Betel Nut (*Areca catechu*) plantation at N. Hlimen, Mizoram, India (24.20198°N, 92.80833°E; elev. 577 m asl). The snake ambushed the frog, grasped its head (Fig. 1), and struggled with



Fig. 1. A female Wall’s Keelback (*Herpetoreas xenura*) feeding on a female Assam Forest Frog (*Hydrophylax leptoglossa*). Photograph by Lal Muansanga.

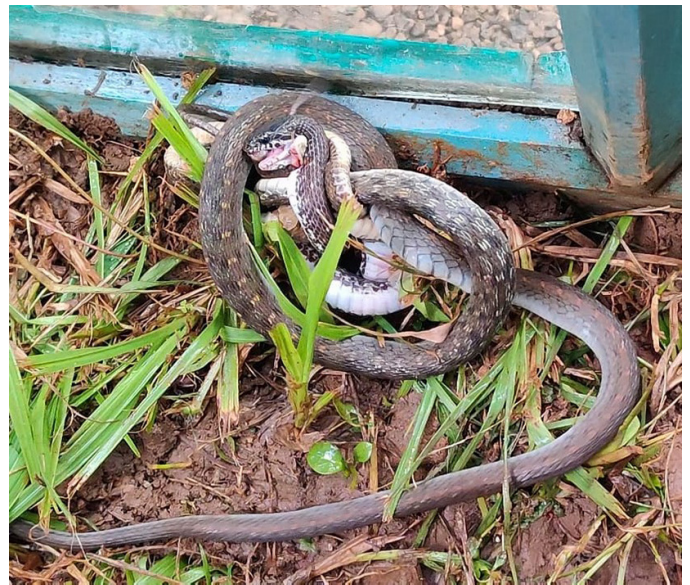


Fig. 2. A female Wall’s Keelback (*Herpetoreas xenura*) feeding on a male Orange-collared Keelback (*Rhabdophis himalayanus*). Photograph by Yash Singh Rathee.

it for 9 min before swallowing it. Elapsed time from strike to complete ingestion was about 18 mins. We did not disturb the snake while it was feeding but collected it for morphological measurements before releasing it into suitable habitat on 30 July 2020.

At 0715 h on 13 August 2020, we encountered another female *H. xenura* (SVL 488 mm) feeding on a male Orange-collared Keelback (*Rhabdophis himalayanus*) (SVL ca. 350 mm) adjacent to a residence in Umroi, Meghalaya, India (25.68624°N, 91.93215°E; elev. 957 m asl). At the time of the initial observation, the two snakes were coiled around each other and only later did we notice that the *H. xenura* was engulfing the head of the *R. himalayanus* (Fig. 2), which had



Fig. 3. A road-killed female Wall's Keelback (*Herpetoreas xenura*) with seven eggs recovered from the oviduct. Photograph by L.H. Laltnhlui.

suffocated. Because we did not see the initial strike, we were unable to determine the elapsed time from strike to complete ingestion. The snake was not disturbed and escaped into nearby secondary forest.

At 2030 h on 15 July 2015, we collected a road-killed female *H. xenura* (SVL 562 mm) at Sihphir, Aizawl, Mizoram, India (23.809972°N, 92.749056°E; elev. 1,089 m asl).

Dissection revealed a clutch of seven eggs (Fig. 3); mean length and width of the eggs were 24.22 mm (22.20–25.81 mm) and 12.68 mm (12.16–13.00 mm), respectively. The snake along with eggs were preserved in 10% buffered formalin and catalogued in the Departmental Museum of Zoology, Mizoram University (MZMU 1465).

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