



First Account of a King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*) Eating a Black-tailed Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus flavolineatus*) on Havelock Island, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, India

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The King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*), the world’s longest venomous snake and which might represent a species complex (Suntrarachuna et al. 2014), ranges widely throughout southern and southeastern Asia (David and Vogel 1996;

Schleich and Kästle 2002; Stuart et al. 2012; Uetz et al. 2021). In India, the species has been reported from Maharashtra, Karnataka, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh,



Fig. 1. A King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*) catching, envenomating, and ingesting a Black-tailed Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus flavolineatus*) on Havelock Island, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, India. Photographs by Nariman Vazifdar.

Mizoram, and the Andaman Islands (Das 2002; Whittaker and Captain 2004; Ahmed et al. 2009; Uetz et al. 2021), where it inhabits primary forests and estuarine mangrove swamps with heavy rainfall (Whittaker and Captain 2004). The King Cobra is the only reptile other than crocodylians that actively constructs a nest (Evans 1902) and, as the generic name indicates, it feeds primarily on snakes (Bhaisare et al. 2010).

The Black-tailed Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus flavolineatus*) is distributed from Indonesia and Brunei through south-eastern Asia and onto the Andaman Islands (Grismer and Chan-Ard 2012; Uetz et al. 2021). Although primarily terrestrial, it is a capable climber that typically preys on rodents, frogs, lizards, and birds (Whittaker and Captain 2004).

At 1400 h on 18 June 2021 at Radhanagar Beach, Havelock Island, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, India, NV was informed about a snake in a house, which he recognized as an approximately 2 m-long King Cobra that had seized an approximately 1 m-long Black-tailed Trinket Snake (Fig. 1). The latter had wrapped its tail and posterior body around a table leg and was not letting go. The King Cobra was holding onto the neck of the Black-tailed Trinket Snake and pulling with such force that at times the cobra's body was lifted off the ground and the skin of the trinket snake's neck was peeling off. The cobra also appeared to be envenomating its prey and froth (possibly venom) was visible in its mouth. The cobra was aware of our presence and emitted growl-like noises when one of the locals approached too closely. The tug-of-war went on for about 20 min before the trinket snake succumbed to the venom. The cobra then succeeded in freeing its prey from the table leg and ingested it in roughly 5 min before disappearing into nearby undergrowth.

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