



Scavenging by Indian Kraits, *Bungarus caeruleus* (Schneider 1801) (Elapidae), in Alibag, Maharashtra, India

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The Indian Krait (*Bungarus caeruleus*) is a frequently encountered venomous snake of medical importance. These snakes are commonly found near water in forested areas but readily adapt to modified habitats like farms and gardens, and, although primarily nocturnal (Whitaker and Captain 2008), are frequently sighted when entering houses or crossing roads. Indian Kraits prey on other snakes, lizards, frogs, and mice (Khaire 2021). *Bungarus caeruleus* also has been observed opportunistically scavenging roadkills (Mohapatra 2011; Deshmukh et al. 2016; Debata 2017).

On three occasions, we have observed *Bungarus caeruleus* scavenging roadkills during nocturnal road surveys near Alibag, Maharashtra, India. At 2300 h on 6 December 2020, at Sogaon village (18.656654 N, 72.879868' E), we encountered an adult *B. caeruleus* (total length ~90 cm) moving from roadside grass onto a blacktop road while actively flicking its tongue and apparently following a scent trail toward what appeared to be a freshly road-killed mouse (*Mus* sp.) in the center of the road. After approaching and inspecting the roadkill, the krait carried it to the other side of the road,

where it swallowed the prey before moving into the roadside undergrowth (Fig. 1). After heavy rainfall at 1238 h on 20 June 2022, at Bandhan village (18.665222 N, 73.011000 E), we encountered a juvenile *B. caeruleus* (~30 cm) approaching a road-killed juvenile *Fowlea piscator* (total length ~15 cm). Grasping the keelback in its mouth, the krait carried it to the side of the road and swallowed it headfirst. On the same night, at 1259 h, about 2 km from the previous location, we saw another juvenile *B. caeruleus* (~20 cm) feeding on a severely mutilated road-killed *Amphiesma stolatum* in the middle of the road, which the krait swallowed before moving into roadside undergrowth.

The third observation was noteworthy since the prey was nothing more than a mangled mass of tissue stuck to the road, suggesting that *B. caeruleus* relies on vomeronasal cues to respond to chemical signatures of dead and decaying animals (e.g., Burghardt 1993). Also of interest is that most reported incidents of scavenging by Indian Kraits occur during the rainy season (Table 1), presumably attributable to increased activity resulting in more roadkills.

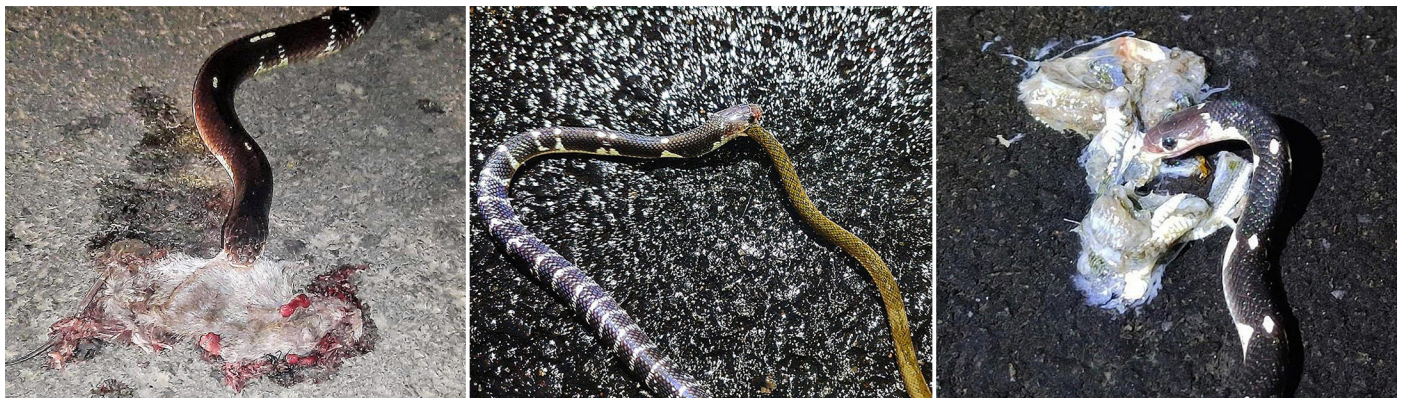


Figure 1. An adult Indian Krait (*Bungarus caeruleus*) scavenging a road-killed mouse (*Mus* sp.) (left); a juvenile Indian Krait scavenging a road-killed Checkered Keelback (*Fowlea piscator*) (center); a juvenile Indian Krait scavenging a severely mutilated road-killed Striped Keelback (*Amphiesma stolatum*) (right). All were encountered near Alibag, Maharashtra, India. Photographs by Prasad Dabholkar.

Table 1. Reports of scavenging by Indian Kraits (*Bungarus caeruleus*).

Scavenged Prey	Location in India (month)	Reference
Decomposing <i>Coelognathus helena helena</i>	Ganjam, Odisha (May)	Mohapatra 2011
Road-killed <i>Bungarus caeruleus</i>	Nagpur, Maharashtra (July)	Deshmukh et al. 2016
Road-killed gecko (<i>Hemidactylus</i> sp.)	Balasore, Odisha (June)	Debata 2017
Road-killed mouse (<i>Mus</i> sp.)	Alibag, Mumbai, Maharashtra (December)	Present study
Fresh road-killed <i>Fowlea piscator</i>	Alibag, Mumbai, Maharashtra (June)	Present study
Mutilated road-killed <i>Amphiesma stolatum</i>	Alibag, Mumbai, Maharashtra (June)	Present study

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