



First Report of Albinism in the Blue-necked Keelback, *Rhabdophis rhodomelas* (Boie 1827), from Singapore

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The Blue-necked Keelback, *Rhabdophis rhodomelas* (Boie 1827), has been recorded from southern Thailand, peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, Sumatra, Java, and Borneo, where it occurs in primary and secondary lowland forest (Charlton 2019). This species is both diurnal and crepuscular; by day, it may be encountered on the ground in close proximity to bodies of water, whereas at night, it rests on low plants or shrubs. *Rhabdophis rhodomelas* possesses enlarged rear teeth and has been reported to cause serious envenomation in humans (Subaraj 2008). Furthermore, it has the ability to secrete toxins sequestered from toad prey through nuchal glands as a defensive measure (Takeuchi et al. 2018). Typical body coloration is rich orange-brown with a dark brown or black chevron on the nape that narrows to a prominent dark middorsal line that extends to the tip of the tail. The light

blue or gray-blue sides of the neck give this species its common name.

Albinism is the reduction or total absence of melanin pigmentation, resulting in a white, yellowish, or orangish body and red eyes. This genetic trait has been frequently recorded in snakes but is generally scarce in nature, largely attributable to low survival rates (Gezova et al. 2018). Herein, we report an observation of albinism in *R. rhodomelas* in Singapore.

On 3 February 2023 at 1045 h (SGT), an unsexed juvenile *R. rhodomelas* (TL approx. 25 cm) was encountered moving through leaf litter below a metal boardwalk in disturbed secondary forest at the edge of Singapore’s Central Catchment Nature Reserve. The snake lacked the distinguishing dark chevron on the nape and dark vertebral stripe and the pupils were red (Fig. 1). The specimen was photographed in-situ and was later confirmed as an albino. Although this species has been known to flatten its neck like a cobra, this particular individual remained calm and placid throughout the encounter. To the best of our knowledge this is the first record of albinism in *R. rhodomelas* and a novel observation for Singapore.



Figure 1. An albino Blue-necked Keelback (*Rhabdophis rhodomelas*) from the Central Catchment Nature Reserve, Singapore. Photograph by John Paul Foenander.

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