



An Observation of Ophiophagy in the Kenyan Sandboa (*Eryx colubrinus*)

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Kenyan Sandboas (*Eryx colubrinus*) are native to East Africa (Branch 2014) and often are kept as pets. In nature, they occur in arid or semi-arid regions, where they feed on a variety of small prey such as lizards, rodents, and birds (Branch 2014). Although reports of ophiophagy in snakes are not uncommon (e.g., Jackson et al. 2004), no published records document ophiophagy by Kenyan Sandboas in either captivity or nature. We herein report a case of ophiophagy in *E. colubrinus* in captivity.

On 17 February 2022, a captive-bred *E. colubrinus* (sex unknown, total length approximately 30 cm) had a markedly distended abdomen after being temporarily housed with a mixed-sex group of Eastern Cornsnakes (*Pantherophis guttatus*) about 40 cm in total length for a period of approximately two hours while the cornsnake enclosure was being cleaned. When the cornsnakes were returned to their enclosure, one was missing. The snake room with the enclosures

was designed to be escape proof and the room was thoroughly searched without finding the missing snake. A subsequent search through the substrate of the sandboa enclosure uncovered the *E. colubrinus* that looked like it had recently consumed a large meal. A radiograph (Fig. 1) taken at a local veterinary clinic revealed the missing *P. guttatus*.

In nature, Kenyan Sandboas burrow through sandy substrates and ambush prey (Coborn 1991; Rogner 1997; Bartlett and Bartlett 2011). In this case, we cannot say why the *E. colubrinus* ingested the cornsnake. The sandboa had been well-fed and was not under any apparent stress. We believe that it opportunistically consumed the cornsnake when it became available, as it presumably would do in nature.

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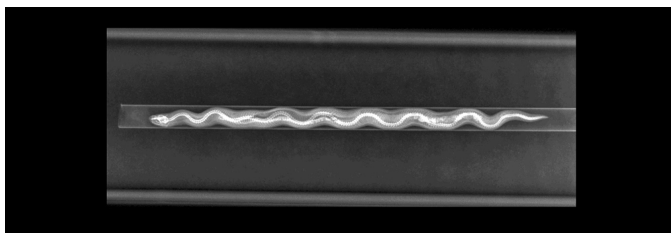


Figure 1. Radiograph of a Kenyan Sandboa (*Eryx colubrinus*) containing an Eastern Cornsnake (*Pantherophis guttatus*). Photograph by Soham Mukherjee.