



# Ambush Hunting by a Checkered Keelback (*Fowlea piscator*) on Nile Tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*) in Lalbagh Lake, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

B.S. Chandan<sup>1</sup> and U.B. Roy<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Applied Zoology, Mangalore University, Mangalagangotri, Mangaluru, Karnataka 574199, India (chandugowda.sinu@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Department of Post Graduate Studies in Zoology, Nrupathunga University, Sampangi Rama Nagara, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560009, India (royub09@gmail.com)

The Checkered Keelback (*Fowlea piscator*) is distributed from Afghanistan east to southern China and southeastern Asia (Whitaker and Captain 2004; Das and Das 2017). These snakes typically predate on fishes, anurans, and arthropods (Hossain 2016; Parmar 2018; Greeshma and Jayson 2021), also they are known to feed on geckos, rodents, and anurans eggs (Phansalkar and Gowande 2017; Kalki 2020, 2021), and rarely feed on birds and turtles (Whitaker and Captain 2004; Gyawali 2019). Juveniles feed on aquatic insects and amphibian eggs (Shah and Tiwari 2004; Whitaker and Captain 2004).

Bengaluru City is aptly known as the City of Lakes due to the large number of water bodies present in and around the city. Checkered Keelbacks (*Fowlea piscator*) are frequently observed and Nile Tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*) are commercially introduced and harvested fish in the city's lakes. Herein we document ambush hunting by *F. piscator* on *O. niloticus*.

At 1130 h on 2 March 2019, we observed multiple Checkered Keelbacks foraging and basking along the banks of Lalbagh Lake in Bengaluru, Karnataka, India (12.946573, 77.583185). One snake approximately 1 m in length slowly

approached a shoal of *O. niloticus*, pausing on the surface among the fish with its head exposed but its body completely submerged before successfully ambushing a medium-sized *O. niloticus* (Fig. 1), which it dragged onto the bank while nearby fish scattered. The snake subdued the fish by striking it on a rock before ingesting it tail-first while pinning it against stones; this is a common strategy observed in keelbacks (Bhatnagar 2021; Brakels et al. 2021).

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**Figure 1.** A Checkered Keelback (*Fowlea piscator*) in Lalbagh Lake, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India, foraging amidst a shoal of Nile Tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*) (left) and with a successful capture (middle and right). Photographs by B.S. Chandan.

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