



A Spectacled Cobra (*Naja naja*) Preying on a Common Wolfsnake (*Lycodon aulicus*) in an Urban Habitat of Surat, Gujarat, India

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The Spectacled Cobra (*Naja naja*) is a venomous elapid that is widely distributed in a variety of habitats, including those altered by human activity, across India (excluding the northeast), Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan (Whitaker and Captain 2004). These snakes have a diverse diet that includes rodents, birds, frogs, and reptiles, including other snakes (Daniel 2002), and also are known to scavenge opportunistically (Patel et al. 2018). The Common Wolfsnake (*Lycodon aulicus*), a non-venomous colubrid, feeds primarily on small reptiles, including geckos and skinks (Daniel 2002). Recent studies by Kalki et al. (2022) and Weiss and Kalki (2023) have shown that 41.6% of the Spectacled Cobra's diet consists of other snakes, including species such as Russel's Viper (*Daboia russelii*), Banded Racer (*Lycodon fasciolatus*), Short-nosed Vinesnake (*Ahaetulla prasina*), and Oriental Ratsnake (*Ptyas mucosa*).

On 3 October 2020, we received a distress call on the Nature Club Surat's helpline regarding a snake inside a residence in Surat. Upon arrival, we found a subadult *N. naja* (~45 cm total length) in the process of ingesting a Common Wolfsnake (~30 cm total length) (Fig. 1). The cobra had

already swallowed over half of the wolfsnake's body. However, the presence of spectators caused the cobra to regurgitate its prey (Fig. 1). The cobra then attempted to escape but was safely relocated by the rescue team.

Ophiophagy by species of *Naja* is rarely observed and, although long considered to be uncommon, might occur more frequently than previously thought (Maritz et al. 2019; Bhardwaj and Kapoor 2022; Rödel et al. 2023). This observation emphasizes the opportunistic nature of cobras and their ability to adapt to altered habitats, including residential areas (Vyas 2020). It also underscores the importance of reducing human interference during wildlife rescues to preserve natural behaviors.

Acknowledgements

We thank Snehal Patel and the Nature Club Surat for their support and dedication to wildlife rescue and conservation, which made this observation possible.

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Figure 1. A Spectacled Cobra (*Naja naja*) ingesting on Common Wolfsnake (*Lycodon aulicus*) in Surat, India (left). The Common Wolfsnake that was regurgitated by the Spectacled Cobra when disturbed by spectators prior to being relocated (right). Photographs by XXX.

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