



First Reported Case of Cannibalism in the Sri Lankan Krait, *Bungarus ceylonicus* Günther 1864

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The Sri Lankan Krait (*Bungarus ceylonicus*; Elapidae) is a venomous Sri Lankan endemic known locally as මුදු කරුවල (mudu karawala) (Somaweera et al. 2023). Its habitat is mainly in the wet zone and some parts of the intermediate climatic zones of southeastern Sri Lanka at elevations of 30–1,700 m asl (De Silva 1979, 1987). This nocturnal snake species reaches a maximum known length of 1,349 mm (De Silva and Perera 1987). Snakes in the genus *Bungarus* Daudin 1803 are known to be ophiophagous (Greene 1997; Biakzuala et al. 2021; Solanki and Khare 2022; Patel 2024), but the only known instance of ophiophagy in *B. ceylonicus* is of an individual feeding on a Sri Lankan Catsnake (*Boiga ceylonensis*) (Phillips 1929). We herein present, to the best of

our knowledge, the first documented observation of cannibalism in this species.

At about 0735 h on 23 January 2024, we noticed two adult *B. ceylonicus* (total lengths ~1 m and ~60 cm) biting each other beside a small paved road in the Buthkanda area, near Deniyaya, Sri Lanka (6.370556, 80.668972) (Fig. 1). We initially thought this might be an example of ritual fight or mating. For ~5 min, the struggle was very active, with both snakes biting the neck and body of the other, when suddenly the larger individual grasped the smaller snake's head. After holding it continuously for ~3 min, the smaller snake was completely motionless and possibly dead. After head-first ingestion was initiated, the prey was lifted and swung from side to side while



Figure 1. Cannibalism in Sri Lankan Kraits (*Bungarus ceylonicus*) along a road near Deniyaya, Sri Lanka. Photographs by Dilanga Madushan.

the larger snake constantly moved, reaching both sides of the road during the process. Complete ingestion took 16 min, after which the larger snake moved very quickly and without any difficulty despite the prey in its stomach, climbing a stone wall ~3 m away before disappearing from our view. The weather was cloudy and misty. To avoid disturbing the animals, we maintained a distance of ~3 m throughout the observation.

Cannibalism at any stage of the life cycle is a common phenomenon in many animals and can play an important role in the ecology and evolution of many species (Elgar and Crespi 1992). Benefits include additional nutrient intake, elimination of reproductive and resource-based competition, and/or control of territory (Polis 1981). Observations such as these, even as single events, can broaden the scope of information about the natural history and ecology of krait snakes and their diet.

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