



# First Report of Scavenging by an Oriental Ratsnake, *Ptyas mucosa* (Linnaeus 1758) (Squamata: Colubridae), from West Bengal, India

Anirban Das

Pran Prohori, Purbachal, Station Road, Duttapukur, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal, India- 743248 (anituadas@gmail.com)

The Oriental Ratsnake (*Ptyas mucosa*) is a common snake widely distributed across southern and southeastern Asia (Uetz et al. 2025), where it inhabits a variety of habitats, including forests and areas near human settlements (Whitaker and Captain 2004). This species is a dietary generalist that has been recorded feeding on a variety of prey, including anurans, lizards, snakes (including conspecifics), tortoises, birds,

rodents, and bats, and even ingesting onions, plastics, cloth, and other miscellaneous matter (Whitaker and Captain 2004; Sharma et al. 2026; Saha and Chaudhuri 2017; Parmar and Patel 2022; Joshi et al. 2023; Samson et al. 2023). I herein report an observation of scavenging from West Bengal, India.

At 1125 h on 16 December 2024, I observed an adult *P. mucosa* (~ 2 m in total length) feeding on an adult Checkered



**Figure 1.** An Oriental Ratsnake (*Ptyas mucosa*) scavenging a dead adult Checkered Keelback (*Fowlea piscator*) at Bortir bil, near Barrackpore, North 24 Parganas District, West Bengal, India. Photographs by Anirban Das.

Keelback (*Fowlea piscator*) (~ 70 cm in total length) (Fig. 1) at Bortir bil (22.792433, 88.43384), near Barrackpore, North 24 Parganas District, West Bengal, India. Complete ingestion took approximately 2 min. The snake was not disturbed and, after feeding, moved into a nearby paddy field.

The *F. piscator* initially appeared to be alive, but upon closer examination, was found to be dead and partially decomposed prior to being swallowed by the *P. mucosa*. The cause of death was unknown.

Snakes usually capture and ingest live prey head-first (Brown et al. 2003). In this case, however, the ratsnake ingested the keelback beginning with the posterior part of the body. This type of feeding behavior is uncommon in snakes and could be associated with scavenging.

### Acknowledgements

I thank Dr. Pratyush P. Mohapatra, Scientist-E and Officer-in-Charge, Reptilia Section, Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata, for the identification of the snakes and encouragement to report the natural history observation; Mr. Sumidh Ray for help in writing the manuscript; and the Director,

Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata, and the Technical Section of ZSI for permission to work as an intern at ZSI.

### Literature Cited

- Brown, C., C. Foster, J. Spivey-White, and J. Hesletine. 2003. Feeding behaviour in monitor lizards and snakes; does direction of prey ingestion influence prey handling time? *Herpetological Bulletin* 83: 26–29.
- Joshi, P., S. Soni, and A. Figueroa. 2023. Cannibalism in the Oriental Ratsnake, *Ptyas mucosa* (Linnaeus, 1758), in Mumbai, Maharashtra, India. *Herpetology Notes* 16: 661–663.
- Parmar, D.S. and V.D. Patel. 2022. Plastic ingestion by the Indian snakes *Ptyas mucosa* and *Coelognathus helena helena* (Serpentes: Colubridae). *Phyllomedusa* 21: 91–94. <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2316-9079.v21i1p91-94>.
- Saha, A. and A. Chaudhuri. 2017. *Ptyas mucosa* (Indian Rat Snake). Diet/Cannibalism. *Herpetological Review* 48: 681.
- Samson, K., A. Abinash, C.S. Vishnu, and R. Sagadevan. 2023. A regurgitation event in Indian Ratsnake *Ptyas mucosa* (Linnaeus, 1758) provides insights into its diet. *Hamadryad* 40: 59–62.
- Sharma, V., A. Sayyed, and R. Bhandari. 2016. Herbivory and inanimate objects in the diet of the Oriental Ratsnake, *Ptyas mucosa* (Linnaeus 1758). *Reptiles & Amphibians* 23: 102–103. <https://doi.org/10.17161/randa.v23i2.14115>.
- Uetz, P., P. Freed, R. Aguilar, F. Reyes, J. Kuder, and J. Hošek (eds.). 2025. *The Reptile Database*. <<http://www.reptile-database.org/>>.
- Whitaker, R. and A. Captain. 2004. *Snakes of India: The Field Guide*. Draco Books, Chennai, India.