

Ophiophagous behaviour of Two-lined Coral Snake *Calliophis bilineata* on Palawan Island, Philippines

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Photograph by: Raymond V. Gonzales.

Subject identified by: Emerson Y. Sy.

Location: Mount Mantalingajan, Municipality of Brooke's Point, Palawan Island, Philippines.

Elevation: 1200 metres

Habitat: Primary, montane forest.

Date and time: 01 February 2016, 15:00 hrs.

Identity of subjects: Two-lined Coral Snake, *Calliophis bilineata* (Reptilia: Squamata: Serpentes).

Description of record:

A Two-lined Coral Snake was observed along a small foot trail, biting a conspecific by the neck (Fig. 1). As the predator was disturbed by the observers, it dragged the struggling prey into an area with dense leaf litter, intertwining vines and saplings. The prey initially attempted to resist by anchoring its tail on vines/saplings, but the bigger and stronger predator prevailed. Subsequently, the prey was motionless. The event was observed for more than two minutes before both snakes were obscured by leaf litter and plants.



Fig. 1.

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Remarks: The elapid snakes are identified as *Calliophis bilineata* based on (i) head not distinct from neck, (ii) prefrontal scales are cream in color (typical individuals have orange prefrontals), (iii) a median black stripe from frontal to tail, covering three rows and two half rows of scales, (iv) a pair of yellow dorsolateral stripes, (v) ventral scales with alternating black bars, two- or three-scales wide, (vi) narrow white line on the sides, between ventral and body scales and (vii) underside of tail is vivid reddish-orange in color (Taylor, 1922). *Calliophis bilineata* is endemic to the Philippines and is currently known to occur on the islands of Balabac, Busuanga, Calauit, Culion, and Palawan (Taylor, 1922; Leviton, 1963).

Calliophis bilineata was formerly considered a subspecies of *Calliophis intestinalis* (Leviton, 1963; Alcalá, 1986), however, we follow Leviton *et al* (2014) in treating it as a distinct species. Ophiophagous behaviour has been documented for *Calliophis intestinalis* (Das, 2010) and among Philippine snakes, King Cobra *Ophiophagus hannah*, Double-barred Coral Snake *Hemibungarus gemianulis*, Alcalá's Triangle-spotted Snake *Cyclocorus lineatus alcalai*, and Common Mock Viper *Psammodynastes pulverulentus* are known to exhibit ophiophagous behaviour (Taylor, 1922; Langenberger, 2004; Gaulke, 2011). Although the actual consumption of the snake was not observed, this note may be the first record of ophiophagous behaviour and cannibalism in *Calliophis bilineata*.

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