

## Dispersal behaviour of Dwarf Snakehead *Channa gachua* at Bukit Kinta Forest Reserve, Perak, Peninsular Malaysia

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**Observer:** Li Ann Ng.

**Photographs by:** Casey K. C. Ng.

**Subject identified by:** Casey K. C. Ng.

**Location:** Bukit Kinta Forest Reserve, Perak, Peninsular Malaysia.

**Elevation:** 306 metres

**Habitat:** Stagnant freshwater puddle.

**Date and time:** 08 October 2017, 13:35 hrs.

**Identity of subject:** Dwarf Snakehead, *Channa gachua* (Teleostei: Perciformes: Channidae).

**Description of record:** Two Dwarf Snakehead were found by the first author in a small puddle beside a path near Ulu Geroh Orang Asli Village. Some unidentified tadpoles also occurred in the same location. The puddle was murky and it had dimensions of around 40 cm (length), 25 cm (width) and 20 cm (depth). The nearest running stream was estimated to be 15 metres away from the puddle. Between the stream and the puddle there were bare sandy ground, exposed tree roots and dense forest floor vegetation. Initially, only one specimen was detected, but subsequently another specimen was found after the authors decided to transfer the specimens back into the nearest stream: this decision was taken as the puddle was at risk of drying up.



Fig. 1. One of the specimens photographed from above the water

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Fig. 2. Nearest stream.

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**Remarks:** Adult Dwarf Snakehead are typically dark bodied with red/orange margins on their dorsal, anal and caudal fins. The two specimens exhibited a late juvenile body pattern with dark bars and blotches (Fig. 1). Although sex could not be determined because the specimen's genital papilla was too small, the second author hypothesized that the specimens were a mating pair because one was observed to "dance" to the other one frequently when placed together. Since there was no sign of recent flooding, the presence of a mating pair in a puddle away from the nearest stream (Fig. 2) is an interesting occurrence as it raises some questions: 1) Did the pair intentionally moved away together from the main stream as an evasive strategy in preparation for spawning and to prevent predation of its fries; 2) Is this how *C. gachua*'s facultative air breathing ability is utilized for population dispersal across the wetter part of the forest floor?; and 3) Is 15 metres the distance threshold of overland movement for *C. gachua* or can it naturally traverse a greater distance? These need to be investigated.

**References:**

Kottelat M. (2013). The fishes of the inland waters of Southeast Asia: A catalogue and core bibliography of the fishes known to occur in freshwaters, mangroves and estuaries. *Raffles Bulletin of Zoology*. 27: 1-663.