

## Predation attempt by King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*) on Clouded Monitor (*Varanus nebulosus*) on Pulau Bintan, Riau Archipelago, Indonesia

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**Observer:** Bosco P.L. Chan.  
**Photographs by:** Bosco P.L. Chan.  
**Subjects identified by:** Bosco P.L. Chan.

**Location:** "Bintan Resorts" area along the north coast of Pulau Bintan, Riau Archipelago, Indonesia.

**Elevation:** 20 metres.

**Habitat:** Abandoned, overgrown coconut plantation at the edge of secondary rainforest with an average canopy height of ca. 15 metres, ca. 170 metres from the shore.

**Date and time:** 26 July 2018, 08:20 hrs.

**Identity of subjects:**

- (i) King Cobra, *Ophiophagus hannah* (Reptilia: Squamata: Elapidae).
- (ii) Clouded Monitor, *Varanus nebulosus* (Reptilia: Squamata: Varanidae)



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.

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**Description of record:** A young King Cobra, estimated at ca. 220 cm total length, was observed climbing up a coconut tree at ca. 8 metres off the ground (Fig. 1), and a Clouded Monitor with an estimated snout-vent length of ca. 30 cm was seen ca. 1 metre above the snake (Fig. 2). It was obvious the snake was attempting to prey on the monitor lizard, but the lizard remained stationary as the King Cobra approached (Fig. 3), until the snake was ca. 40 cm away, at which point the lizard climbed further up the coconut tree. The King Cobra struggled to tackle the vertical tree trunk and gave up after four minutes with a few failed attempts to reach the monitor lizard. The King Cobra proceeded to climb down the tree slowly but froze when it detected my presence (Fig. 4). The subjects both remained in these static positions for 27 minutes of continuous observation, before the author's departure.

**Remarks:** The King Cobra was identified based on (i) head and general body shape, (ii) presence of paired post-occipital scales and (iii) large eyes with rounded pupils. The Clouded Monitor was identified based on (i) head and general body shape, (ii) greyish brown body speckled with fine yellow spots and (iii) position of the nostrils.

The author is not aware of a herpetofaunal checklist for Bintan Island, but both the King Cobra and Clouded Monitor are widespread throughout Southeast Asia including Peninsular Malaysia and the Greater Sunda Islands (Cox et al., 1998; Das, 2012), thus their presence on Pulau Bintan is not unexpected.

The King Cobra has been documented to prey on varanids (Siler et al., 2011; Das, 2012). The Clouded Monitor has been recorded from Pulau Bintan (Chasen & Smedley, 1927). Arida & Setyawatiningsih (2015) reported that their specimens of Clouded Monitor from the Riau Archipelago were also found in coconut plantations.

#### References:

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- Cox, M. J., van Dijk, P.P., Nabhitabhata, J. & Thirakhupt, K. (1998). A photographic guide to snakes and other reptiles of Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. New Holland Publishers (UK) Ltd. London, United Kingdom. 144 pp.

Das, I. (2012). *A Naturalist's Guide to the Snakes of Thailand and Southeast Asia*. Asia Books Co. Ltd., Bangkok, Thailand. 160 pp.

Siler, C.D., Welton, L.J., Brown, R.M., Infante, C. and Diesmos, A.C. (2011). *Ophiophagus hannah* (King Cobra) diet. *Herpetological Review* 42(2): 297.