

Three snakes from coastal habitats at Pulau Sugi, Riau Islands, Indonesia

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SIGHTING RECORD: 1

Observers: Chan Su Hooi, Nick Baker.

Photograph by: Nick Baker.

Subject identified by: Nick Baker.

Location: Telunas Beach, Pulau Sugi, Riau Islands, Indonesia. (Lat 0° 47.671'N Long 103° 46.768'E)

Habitat: Sandy beach, comprising mainly coralline sediments.

Date and time: 6 October 2007, 18:30 hrs.

Identity of subject: Crab-eating Water Snake, *Fordonia leucobalia* (Reptilia: Serpentes: Homalopsidae)

Description of record: An adult *Fordonia leucobalia*, with an estimated snout-vent length of 60 cm, was found at the edge of the sea on a sandy (coralline) beach (Fig 1.) close to the jetty of Telunas Beach Resort, and around 500 metres from the nearest mangrove habitat. The subject was alive, but made no attempt to move away from a small group of observers.



Fig. 1.

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Remarks: *Fordonia leucobalia* is typically encountered in dense mangrove habitat, with muddy, silty or sandy substrate, where it feeds mainly on crabs. It is unusual to find this snake on an open, sandy beach: possibly it was in a weakened state and had been swept away from mangrove habitat by the tide.

SIGHTING RECORD: 2

Observers: Cai Yixiong, Nick Baker.

Photograph by: Nick Baker.

Subject identified by: Cai Yixiong, Nick Baker.

Location: Telunas Beach, Pulau Sugi, Riau Islands, Indonesia. (Lat 0° 47.671'N Long 103° 46.768'E)

Habitat: Group of small, isolated, mangrove trees on a rocky beach.

Date and time: 7 October 2007, 09:30 hrs.

Identity of subject: Shore Pit Viper, *Cryptelytrops purpureomaculatus* (Reptilia: Serpentes: Viperidae)

Description of record: An adult *Cryptelytrops purpureomaculatus*, was found at eye-level on an isolated, mangrove tree in the inter-tidal zone on an area of beach dominated by rubble and rock outcrop (Fig 2.).



Fig. 2.

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Remarks: *Cryptelytrops purpureomaculatus* is a coastal species of pit viper which typically inhabits mangrove. The colouration of this specimen comprises various shades of brown with bars of darker brown across the dorsum and extending onto the flanks : this patterning is in contrast to specimens from Singapore, 40 km to the north, which are typically dark grey or brown grey with no obvious bars across the dorsum.

SIGHTING RECORD: 3

Observers: Nick Baker, Chan Su Hooi, Cai Yixiong.

Photograph by: Nick Baker.

Subject identified by: Nick Baker.

Location: 2.5 km northwest of Telunas Beach, Pulau Sugi, Riau Islands, Indonesia.

Habitat: Dense mangrove.

Date and time: 8 October 2007, 11:23 hrs.

Identity of subject: Gold-ringed Cat Snake, *Boiga dendrophila* (Reptilia: Serpentes: Colubridae)

Description of record: An adult *Boiga dendrophila*, with an estimated snout-vent length of 1.5 metres, was spotted by a local boatman, resting on a tree branch in an area of dense mangrove of around 250 hectares, lying 2.5 km northwest of Telunas Beach.



Fig. 3.

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Remarks: *Boiga dendrophila* occurs mainly in riverine, freshwater swamp-forest and mangrove habitat. It hunts at night, and rests in the trees by day. The subject shows greatly reduced yellow barring, with each 'bar' reduced to a small blotch comprising just a few scales: on this basis the snake is identified as *Boiga dendrophila melanota*, which is the subspecies occurring to the west of Pulau Sugi (i.e. eastern Sumatra) and to the north (i.e. Singapore and beyond) (Das, 2010).

GENERAL REMARKS

The herpetofauna of the Indonesian islands to the south of Singapore, including Pulau Sugi, appears to have received scant attention by researchers. A compilation of the herpetofauna of Pulau Sugi does not appear to exist, and the present records may be the first formally documented. Baker & Lim (2016) summarised sighting records of nine fish species at Telunas Beach.

The three snakes discussed here are typical components of coastal ecosystems in this part of Southeast Asia, and their occurrence on Pulau Sugi is in accordance with their known distributions.

The island of Pulau Sugi, which lies around 40 km due south of Singapore, measures 17 km by 7 km (Fig. 4.). In comparison with larger islands of the Riau Archipelago, such as Batam and Bintan, it is relatively unpopulated and has little industrial development. Based on spot heights from Google Earth, the highest parts of the interior reach elevations of around 280 metres.



Fig. 4: Part of Riau Archipelago, Indonesia showing the location of Pulau Sugi.

© Google Earth

Coastal habitats on Pulau Sugi include coconut plantations (Fig. 5.), rocky beach and sandy beach (Fig. 6.), coastal forest (Fig. 7.) and mangrove (Fig. 9.). Inland forest habitats appear to be quite degraded based on satellite images from Google Earth (images dated as 2016). Timber extraction was ongoing at the time these sighting records were made : the sound of chainsaws was heard emanating from the hills immediately behind the Telunas Beach Resort, and evidence was found of small-scale destructive logging practices nearby (Fig. 8.). Timber extraction for charcoal also occurs in the mangrove areas 2.5 km northwest of Telunas Beach, where an active charcoal kiln was viewed (Fig. 10.).



Fig. 5: Coconut plantation and fishing village.



Fig. 6: Rocky and sandy beach habitats.



Fig. 7: Coastal forest near Telunas Beach.



Fig. 8: Timber extraction near Telunas Beach.



Fig. 9: Mangrove, 2.5 km northwest of Telunas Beach.



Fig. 10: Charcoal kiln in mangrove area.

All images in Figures 5-10 © Nick Baker

References:

- Baker, N. & Lim, K. K. P. (2016). Fishes observed at Telunas Beach, Pulau Sugi, Riau Islands, Indonesia. *Southeast Asia Vertebrate Records*. 2016: 8-10
- Das, I. (2010). *A Field Guide to the Reptiles of South-east Asia*. New Holland Publishers (UK) Ltd. 376 pp.