Some snake records from
Gunung Arong Forest Reserve, Johor, Peninsular Malaysia

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Observer: Nick Baker.
Photographs by: Nick Baker.
Subjects identified by: Nick Baker.

Location: Gunung Arong Forest Reserve, Johor, Peninsular Malaysia.
Elevation: 5-10 metres above sea level.
Habitat: Freshwater swamp forest, mixed lowland forest (logged primary and secondary) and low-lying scrub.

SIGHTING RECORD: 1

Identity of subject: Gold-ringed Cat Snake, Boiga dendrophila (Reptilia: Squamata: Colubridae).
Date and time: 02 June 2014, 20:59 hrs.

Description of record: An adult Boiga dendrophila, with an estimated total length of 1.4 metres, was observed crossing a two-lane metalled road, near tall secondary forest. It was photographed in a defensive posture once it reached the road shoulder (Fig 1.).

Fig. 1. © Nick Baker
Remarks: *Boiga dendrophila* is a common lowland snake in Peninsular Malaysia, often found near water courses. It inhabits lowland forests, including mangrove and peat swamps, and enters lowland mixed dipterocarp forests (Das, 2010).

**SIGHTING RECORD: 2**

Date and time: 02 June 2014, 21:33 hrs.

Description of record: A juvenile *Boiga nigriceps*, with an estimated total length of 65 cm, was observed crossing a two-lane metalled road bisecting an area of freshwater swamp forest. It was photographed in a defensive posture once it reached the road shoulder, and was then encouraged to return to the forest (Fig 2.).

![Fig. 2.](image)

Remarks: The dorsal surface of the head in adult *Boiga nigriceps* is dark olive green to black, but this colour is absent in juveniles. The example in Figure 2 has a subtle hint of darkening on the head, but its patterning is dominated by dark speckling.

**SIGHTING RECORD: 3**

Date and time: 02 June 2014, 22:00 hrs.

Description of record: A *Calliophis bivirgatus*, with an estimated total length of 70 cm, was observed stationary at the edge of a two-lane metalled road bisecting an area of low-lying scrub (probably cleared, former swamp forest). It was encouraged to move off the road and onto the hard shoulder with a snake hook, and was quickly photographed before it moved beneath roadside vegetation (Fig 3.).

Remarks: *Calliophis bivirgatus* is a common elapid of lowland and lower montane forest in Peninsular Malaysia; it appears to be both nocturnal and diurnal, but is typically encountered early morning resting on forest trails.
SIGHTING RECORD: 4


Date and time: 02 June 2014, 22:17 hrs.

Description of record: A flattened, roadkill *Dendrelaphis pictus*, with an estimated total length of 1 metre, was found on a metalled road in an area of tall, secondary forest. It was photographed in situ (Fig 4.).
Remarks: *Dendrelaphis pictus* is the most commonly encountered of the seven species of *Dendrelaphis* known from Peninsular Malaysia; it is highly adaptable and often occurs in forest-edge settings. Despite the condition of the head in this specimen, it is possible to identify it as *Dendrelaphis pictus* (rather than *Dendrelaphis caudolineatus*) as the dark postocular stripe is still apparent.

**SIGHTING RECORD : 5**

Date and time: 02 June 2014, 18:33 hrs.  
Description of record: A sundried roadkill *Xenochrophis maculatus*, with an estimated total length of 70 cm, was found at the edge of a metalled road passing through tall, secondary forest. It was photographed and discarded in the forest (Fig 5.).

![Image of roadkill](image5.jpg)  
© Nick Baker

Remarks: *Xenochrophis maculatus* inhabits lowland forests and is typically encountered close to water courses or actively hunting in small streams. It appears to be mainly diurnal in habits, and its diet comprises frogs (Das, 2010).

**SIGHTING RECORD : 6**

Date and time: 23 October 2018, 18:09 hrs.  
Description of record: A *Sibynophis melanocephalus*, with an estimated total length of 45 cm, was narrowly avoided whilst driving along a metalled road bisecting an area of freshwater swamp forest. It was stationary in the road and was slow to move away from approaching traffic (Fig 6.). To quickly move the snake to the roadside it was picked up by the tail, however the snake immediately gyrated rapidly and the last 3 or 4 cm of the tail quickly became detached. As the snake finally moved away into roadside vegetation, the shed portion of the tail continued to writhe around on the ground for some minutes, in the same manner as the shed tails of some species of gecko.
Remarks: *Sibynophis melanocephalus* inhabits lowland forests throughout Peninsular Malaysia and appears to be exclusively diurnal. The dorsal surface of the head in this example is greyish-black, but examples where the upper surface of the head is reddish-orange also occur.

The occurrence of caudal autotomy, as described here, is known for the species (Das, 2010) and has been reported for other species of *Sibynophis*, including *S. chinensis* (Noel Thomas, pers. comm.).

**SIGHTING RECORD : 7**


**Date and time:** 24 October 2018, 11:15 hrs.

**Description of record:** A fresh roadkill *Ahaetulla prasina* with buff colouration, and an estimated total length of 50 cm, was found on a metalled road passing through lowland forest. It was moved to the side of the road and photographed (Fig 7.).

**Remarks:** *Ahaetulla prasina* is one of the most common arboreal snakes in Peninsular Malaysia. While most adult snakes are bright green, juveniles are typically buff in colour. The small eyes in this example distinguish this snake from the closely-related Malayan Whip Snake *Ahaetulla mycterizans*, and the absence of speckling on top of the head distinguish it from the Speckle-headed Whip Snake *Ahaetulla fasciolata*. 
GENERAL REMARKS

The seven snake species documented here appear to be the first formally published for the Gunung Arong Forest Reserve. The fauna in this forest reserve, which lies north of the fishing town of Mersing and is on the same latitude as the Endau-Rompin National Park to the west, appears to be little studied or documented. Given its proximity to the highly popular beach resort of Air Papan ideally these forests could be better appreciated (and protected) for their fauna, rather than simply being valued for timber extraction.

This document is the fourth covering vertebrates of Gunung Arong Forest Reserve published by Southeast Asia Vertebrate Records (SEAVR); previous publications include a record of the Large Black Flying Squirrel Aeromys tephromelas (Baker, 2016), some records of bats (Thomas & Baker, 2016) and a record of Short-tailed Mongoose Herpestes brachyurus (Baker, 2017).

References: