

## Predation by a Yellow-lipped Sea Krait, *Laticauda colubrina* (Schneider 1799), on a Moray Eel (*Gymnothorax* sp.) at Balayan Bay, Philippines

Arnel SEVILLA & Przemysław ZDUNEK  
[arnel@portulano.com](mailto:arnel@portulano.com) (Sevilla), [zdunek.komodo@gmail.com](mailto:zdunek.komodo@gmail.com) (Zdunek)

**Observer:** Arnel Sevilla.

**Photographs by:** Arnel Sevilla.

**Subjects identified by:** Przemysław Zdunek.

**Location:** Balayan Bay, Batangas, Luzon Island, Philippines (13.82017°N, 120.90144°E; WGS 84).

**Elevation:** Approx. 15 metres below sea level.

**Habitat:** Dominated by soft and fan corals.

**Date and time:** 08 January 2023, around noon.

### Identity of subjects:

- (i) Yellow-lipped Sea Krait, *Laticauda colubrina* (Reptilia: Squamata: Elapidae)
- (ii) Moray Eel, *Gymnothorax* sp. (Actinopterygii: Anguilliformes: Muraenidae).

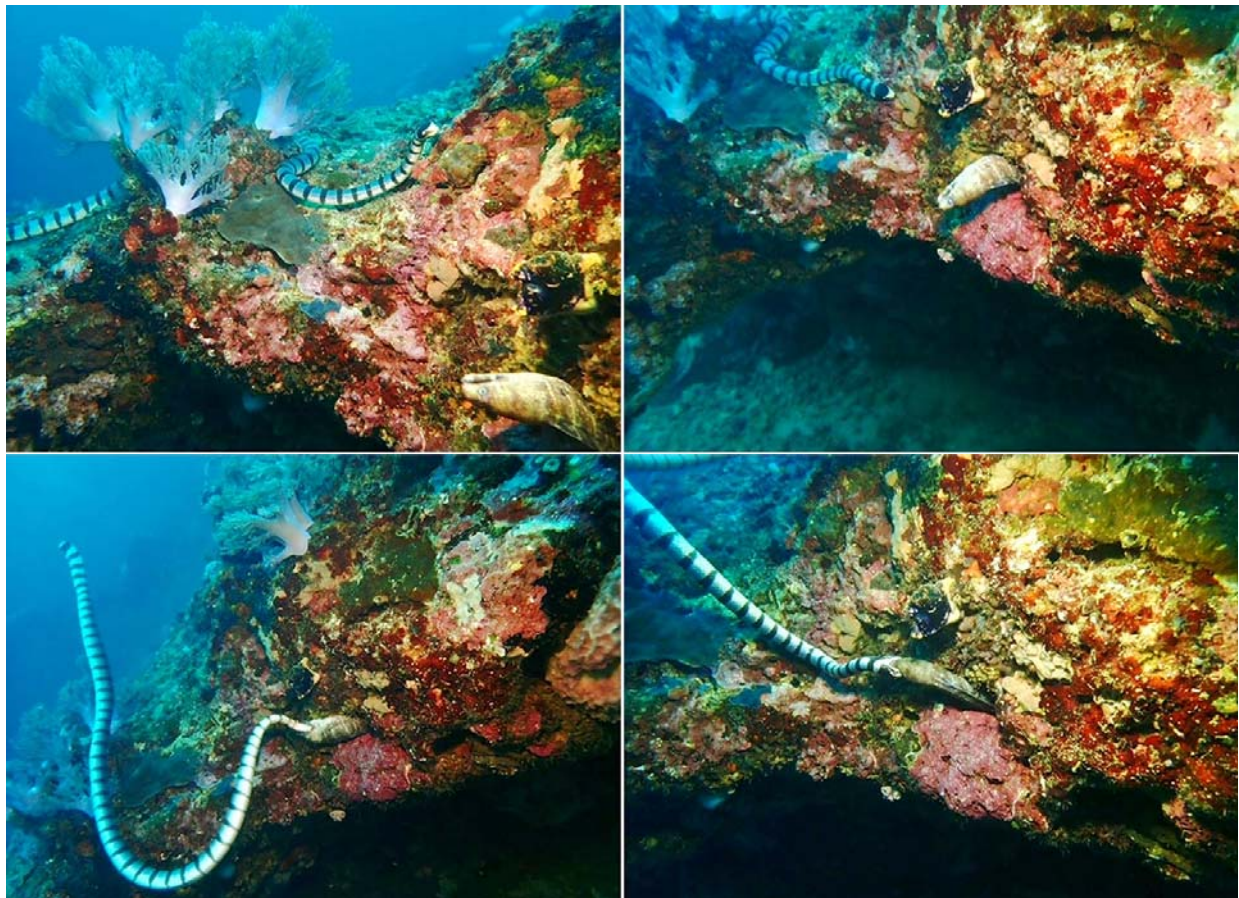


Fig. 1. *Gymnothorax* sp. spotted and being engulfed by an adult *Laticauda colubrina*.

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### Description of record:

During a dive tour at The Pinnacle dive site, Balayan Bay, an adult (estimated total length ~120cm) Yellow-lipped Sea Krait (*Laticauda colubrina*) was observed foraging in crevices at a depth of about 15 meters. The water temperature was 26°C with a strong current. After a while, the snake noticed an eel's head (*Gymnothorax* sp.) protruding from a crevice. The snake bit its prey, holding it by its head until it stopped struggling (Fig. 1). Due to the strong current, the act of swallowing the prey was not photographed.

### Remarks:

The banded patterning, and distinctive yellow upper lip and snout clearly identify this snake as the Yellow-lipped Sea Krait (*Laticauda colubrina*, Schneider 1799) (Das 2021). The eel is identified as a moray eel of the genus *Gymnothorax* based on location, jaw shape, eye color, and general coloration (Allen et al. 2015).

*Laticauda colubrina* is a widely distributed, semi-aquatic venomous snake (Das 2021). It has an eel-specialist diet, although they are known to also prey upon other small fish species (Tan et al. 2017). Observations of this type are known from other areas of occurrence of this species (Heatwole et al. 2005; Bonnet et al. 2010) by examining the contents of the stomach (Herre 1942). Shetty and Shine (2002) documented some sexual divergence in terms of dietary habits with females, which are larger, primarily preying upon conger eels (*Conger* spp.), and males, which are smaller, on moray eels (*Gymnothorax* spp.).

To the best of our knowledge, ours is the first documented direct observation of predation by *L. colubrina* on *Gymnothorax* sp. at Balayan Bay, Philippines (Herre and Rabor, 1949). Even as a single event, this record broadens the scope of information about the natural history and ecology of sea kraits and their prey.

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