

Observatory note on territorial fight of Common Krait *Bungarus caeruleus* from Anaikatti Hills, Kerala, India



Image 1. Sequence of territorial fight of two Common Kraits.

The Common Krait *Bungarus caeruleus* is a nocturnal species of venomous snake found throughout Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal (Ahsan & Rahman 2017). The diet of the species is known to comprise juveniles of own species, other snakes, lizards, frogs, and small mammals (Whitaker & Captain 2004). Cannibalism and scavenging are also known in this species (Smith 1913; Mohapatra 2011; Chowdhury 2017; Debata 2017; Mohalik et al. 2019).

On 06 November 2018, at 20.30h the author encountered two Common Kraits on the middle of the road in Anaikatti Hills, Kerala, India (11.099°N 76.730°E; elevation 621m). The two entwined individuals were of different sizes; individual A was longer and bigger than individual B. I observed the fight until 22.00h, without disturbing the snakes and maintaining enough distance. I made a video recording of 21 minutes of the observation by using a smartphone camera.



Image 2. Stationary individual A disoriented and individual B fleeing the scene.

Here, I present the main events of this observation. Both the individuals were locked in mouth-to-mouth combat (Image 1A–L) for most of the duration of observation. During this period, the fight was dominated by the smaller individual B. For some time, individual A showed little movement and resistance to the grip of individual B.

At one point, individual A was clearly losing the mouth grip, and was seen with its mouth wide open (Image 1G&H). The krait's limpness made us wonder whether the individual was dead, while it was just feigning death. The playing-dead act went on for some time; later, both snakes once again resorted to a mouth-to-mouth clasp. By then, both individuals were intertwined with one another in stereotypical combat behaviour (Lowe 1948) as shown in Image 1M–O).

Around 21.50h, individual B, who had dominated the entire duration of the fight, abruptly fled, leaving individual A behind on the road (Image 1P). Individual A appeared exhausted, as it lay motionless for around 10 minutes (Image 2). It then limply slithered to one side of the road, stopped, and slithered again to the other side of the road. It repeated this disoriented activity two more times.

This record forms the first-ever video documentation of territorial fight of Common Krait. Video recording of parts of the observation can be seen at the following link:

https://youtu.be/XrFS_DnGV-s

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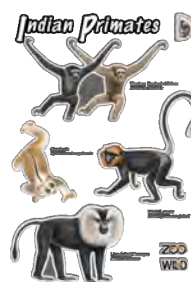
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