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Foods and feeding habits of Forsten’s Cat Snake, Gujarat, India

The Forsten’s Cat Snake *Boiga forsteni* is a nocturnal, arboreal, and forest-dwelling snake, and its maximum body length is over two meters (Whitaker & Captain 2004). The snake possesses a rear fang and it is considered mildly venomous. This species is widely distributed in India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal (Mohapatra et al. 2021) and found in both dry and wet forests, open jungles, forest fringes, and cultivated areas (Schleich & Kastle 2002), where it lives in small to medium bushes, scrubby vegetation, and also on tall trees with profuse branching (Sharma 2003). The Forsten’s Cat Snake widely occurs in the entire Gujarat State, except in dry arid parts of Kutch (Patel & Vyas 2019).

However, very scanty information is available on its diets, except that the snake feeds on lizards,



Forsten’s Cat Snake *Boiga forsteni* devours a Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* at reserved forest of Pavagadh, Panchmahal, Gujarat. © Raju Vyas.



Forsten’s Cat Snake *Boiga forsteni* feeding on a Common Garden Lizard *Calotes versicolor* at Gamdi Village, Vadodara, Gujarat. © Raju Vyas.



birds, domestic chickens, bird eggs, bats, and other small mammals (Smith 1943; Whitaker & Captain 2004). Mohapatra et al. (2009) mentioned the snake feeds on domestic fowl chicks *Gallus domesticus*, Bark Gecko *Hemidactylus leschenaultii*, and a Garden Lizard *Calotes versicolor* in captivity.

Here, present two observations on the feeding of species in the wild with photographic evidence. The observations were recorded on two different occasions at two different locations in the state.

Observation 1: On 15 December 2022, we were on a visit to Pavagadh, Panchmahal, Gujarat. The Pavagadh is a small undulating hilly area with 762 m high elevated hills and well-known religious tourist and world heritage sites. The area is surrounded by dry deciduous forest. During the visit, in the evening time, we came across predating behaviors of the species. An adult Forsten's Cat Snake was foraging on a low-height bush of Lantana *Lantana camara* in search of a prey. A pair of Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* also were foraging on the same bush for the feeding of ripe fruits of the Lantana. The snake suddenly attacked a red-vented bulbul and caught the bird by the neck. The cat snake disappeared into the bush with the prey after a small struggle with the bird. We were not able to see whether the snake engulfed the bird or not, but we presumed it consumed the entire bird.

Observation 2: On 30 March 2023, we were on a visit to an eco-farm at Gamdi Village, Vadodara, Gujarat. The eco-farm is a cultivated teak plantation and riverine mix forest with a few bamboo clusters at the bank of River

Orsang (a tributary of River Narmada). During the visit at noon time, we received a call from a local farmer as a snake was sighted under the vegetation growth. We immediately rushed to the spot to observe which species were there. It was a large Forsten's Cat Snake with prey. The snake was devouring a lizard. It was an adult Common Garden Lizard *Calotes versicolor*. The snake engulfed the lizard within a few minutes and disappeared into nearer dense bushes.

The present opportunistic observations with photographic evidence indicate the species is also prying on Red-vented Bulbul and Common Garden Lizard in the day times.

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Raju Vyas

Shashwat Apartment, Anand Nagar, BPC Haveli Road, Nr. Splatter Studio, Alakapuri, Vadodara, Gujarat 390007, India.
Email: razoovyas@hotmail.com

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