A record of the Taiwanese tree snake (*Boiga kraepelini* Stejneger, 1902) as prey of the many-banded krait

*Boiga multicinctus multicinctus* Blyth, 1861

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The Taiwanese tree snake (*Boiga kraepelini* Stejneger, 1902) occurs in parts of southern and western China and Vietnam (Kuntz, 1963; Zhao and Adler, 1993), and is the only members of the genus *Boiga*, that is known to naturally occur in Taiwan. There, it inhabits low to medium altitude habitats (Lue, Tu and Shang, 2002). Like all the other members of the genus *Boiga*, except for *B. trigonata*, which is terrestrial, *B. kraepelini* is mainly arboreal (Kuntz, 1963; Coborn, 1991; Mattison, 1995; Rodda et al., 1999; Lue, Tu and Shang, 2002).

The many-banded krait (*Bungarus multicinctus multicinctus* Blyth, 1861) naturally occurs from Burma, through Indochina, southern China, Hainan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (Kuntz, 1963; Anonymous, 1991; 1995; Rodda et al., 1999; Lue, Tu and Shang, 2002).

On the 7th of May, 2010, at 20:43, an adult *B. m. multicinctus* (ca. 1.2 m in total length) was encountered along a hiking trail in a secondary forest, on a hill in Dakeng (N24º11’07” E, 120º44’07”, 285 m elev., datum: WGS84), Taichung County, central western Taiwan, as it was in the process of starting to consume an adult male *B. kraepelini*. When the *B. m. multicinctus* was first encountered, it had only the head of the *B. kraepelini* in its mouth. The ingestion of the body of the *B. kraepelini* required about 13 minutes, and at this point the tail of the *B. kraepelini* wrapped around some leaf litter, so the *B. m. multicinctus* dragged it some distance to get rid of the leaves, after which the *B. kraepelini*’s tail wrapped around the head of the *B. m. multicinctus* (Figure 1). In order to free the tail from around its head, the *B. m. multicinctus* rubbed its head against the ground, and after an additional ten minutes, the snake had completely ingested its prey, and left the area.

The predation of *B. m. multicinctus* on snakes in Taiwan is not out of the ordinary, and has been discussed in Mao et al. (2010). Still it is interesting that *B. m. multicinctus*, which is primarily terrestrial, preys on arboreal species. On several occasions two arboreal snake species, the Chinese green snake (*Cyclophiops major*) (Day, Wu and Chen, 1994; Lin, Hwung and Lu, 1995; Mao unpubl. data) and the Stejneger’s bamboo pitviper (*Viridovipera stejnegeri*; formerly *Trimeresurus stejnegeri stejnegeri*) (Lin et al., 1995; Mao unpubl. data), have been recorded as preys of *B. m. multicinctus*. The actual capturing of the *B. kraepelini* by the *B. m. multicinctus* was unfortunately not observed. Based on our previous observations, *C. major*, *V. stejnegeri*, and *B. kraepelini* will be active on the ground or in lower vegetation during the night (Figure 2), which may bring them within reach of a terrestrial predator such as *B. m. multicinctus*, so the chance that the *B. kraepelini* described herein was captured on the ground can not be excluded. However, it should also be stated that on one occasion, a *B. m. multicinctus* was observed during the day ascending vegetation to a height of ca. 2 m to capture a *V. stejnegeri*, which it then ingested on the ground (Ji-Shou Yang, personal communication), so it is also possible that the *B. kraepelini* was captured in such a manner.

Irrespective of how the *B. kraepelini* was captured, the description herein appears to be the first reported case from Taiwan of *B. m. multicinctus* as a predator of *B. kraepelini*.

Acknowledgements. The authors would like to thank Gernot Vogel for his comments and for reviewing the manuscript.

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Figure 1. The *Bungarus multicinctus multicinctus* with the tail of the *Boiga kraepelini* wrapped around its head (photographed by Simon Dieckmann).

Figure 2. A *Boiga kraepelini*, that was encountered on another occasion, on the ground in the same area as where the predation event described herein was observed (photographed by G. Norval).

References


Accepted by Zoltán T. Nagy