**Predation of *Elaphe dione* (Pallas, 1773) by *Dolichophis caspius* (Gmelin, 1789) (Squamata: Colubridae)**

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*Dolichophis caspius*, is one of Europe’s largest snakes, reaching lengths of up to 2.5 metres (Glandt, 2010). Their range stretches from the Balkans and southern Hungary through Turkey, southern Ukraine, southern Russia and to west Kazakhstan and northern Azerbaijan (Arnold and Ovenden, 2004; Sindaco, Venchi and Grieco, 2013). They are found in dry, open habitats with some vegetation or cover (Arnold and Ovenden, 2004). Young *D. caspius* are largely herpetophagous with adults also feeding on small mammals and occasionally birds and (Arnold and Ovenden, 2004). While *D. caspius* feeding on small snakes is widely reported (Arnold and Ovenden, 2004) there are few documented observations of ophiophagy in *D. caspius* with the majority of these observations from populations in the west of the species’ range. A Web of Knowledge search for “("Dolichophis caspius" OR "Coluber caspius") AND (diet OR predat* OR ophiophagy)" returned only two articles: Cattaneo (2001) and Cattaneo (2003). Cattaneo (2001) found *D. caspius* preying on *Natrix natrix* on the Greek island of Lemnos and speculates that ophiophagy is likely to be more common than recorded. Cattaneo (2003) while not recording any first hand sightings of ophiophagy found reports from local residents of the island of Lesbos of *D. caspius* predating *Montivipera xanthina*. In a report on herpetological surveys in western Turkey Cattaneo (2012) found a large male *D. caspius* that had swallowed a full-grown *M. xanthina*.

On 9 June 2013 at 0745 hours while walking along the side of an irrigation channel in the dry steppe of central Kalmykia, southern Russia, at 46°23’17.16”N, 45°0’21.96”E an adult *D. caspius* was encountered in the process of swallowing an adult *Elaphe dione* (Figure 1) head first. The disturbance caused by the observer resulted in the *D. caspius* disgorging the *E. dione* and retreating. It was not possible to accurately measure the length of the preyed upon *E. dione* however comparisons against equipment carried estimate its length to be approximately 85 cm.

This observation confirms that ophiophagy occurs in eastern populations of *D. caspius* and may be more common than widely believed. It also shows that *D. caspius* is not restricted to preying on small snakes (as is widely quoted) and can overcome and attempt to swallow snakes over 80 cm in length.

**References**


Figure 1. Adult *Dolichophis caspius* while disgorging an adult *Elaphe dione* along the side of an irrigation channel in the dry steppe of central Kalmykia, southern Russia