

Death feigning behaviour in *Aplopeltura boa*

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The blunt-headed slug snake, *Aplopeltura boa* is a member of the Preatidae (Pyron et al., 2011), which is a group of arboreal, nocturnal and mollusc-eating snakes widely distributed in tropical and subtropical regions of South-eastern Asia (e.g. Das, 2012; You et al., 2015). This species inhabits lowland and sub-montane forest up to 1500 m a.s.l. and is often found in understory bushes and undergrowth. Data about the life history of the species are limited: this paper describes death feigning behaviour have not previously been reported.

On 27th February 2009, the second author (DH) found one adult specimen of *A. boa* inside the Taman Rimba Teluk Bahang area of Pulau Pinang Island, west Malaysia. The individual was found in dense tropical forest located close to a small stream (5.435°N, 100.232°E; WGS84, 332 m elev.) just after 23:00h (local time). The snake was observed on a tree approximately 2 m above the ground. After capture, the individual immediately rolled up the front side of its body into a “coil” (Fig. 1A) and when placed on the ground rolled up the whole of its body (Fig. 1B,C). The individual remained in this position for 10 minutes. The mouth was closed throughout. No defensive defecation or smell was emitted.

For snakes, death feigning includes immobility and mouth gapping, often with the tongue hung out, and in more dramatic situations involves voluntary supination and lack of muscle tone (Gregory et al., 2007). Here we recorded immobility and rolled body without mouth gapping. This is similar to observations of immobility in *Antractaspis*

engaddenensis (see Golani & Kochva, 1988). It is possible that as in *Antractaspis*, the death feigning response in *A. boa* does not always occur with the same intensity. This might explain why death feigning has not been reported for this species previously. However, Taylor (1965) described the immobility at *A. boa* after falling to the ground from a tree. Speculatively, this species may use death feigning in addition to cryptic coloration to evade predation. Death feigning has also been recorded for other genera of Indo-Malayan snakes, including *Coelognathus*, *Macrocalamus* and *Xenochrophis* (Vogel & Han-Yuen, 2010).

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Figure 1. Death feigning behaviour at *A. boa*. A – After first contact the snake rolled up its front side of the body. The individual after it had been caught; B – ventral part; C – dorsal part.

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