

An observation of scavenging by a Spectacled cobra *Naja naja* on a road killed Russell's viper *Daboia russelii*

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Roads have direct and indirect negative effects on wildlife and pose a significant threat to vertebrates at the global level (Forman et al., 2003) due to the numbers of animals killed on roads. Road kill carcasses are also a potential food source and frequently scavenged by other animals. This is the case in India but it is a behaviour often overlooked in the literature. For instance snakes are known to scavenge on birds, frogs, lizards, mammals and other snakes on road kills (Romulus Whitaker Per. Comm.). In this note we report on an observation of road scavenging by a spectacled cobra *Naja naja* on a road killed Russell's viper *Daboia russelii*.

On the evening of 13th November 2014, while travelling from Navsari to Surat (21° 3'19.65"N, 72°54'44.00"E) we observed a *N. naja* consuming a road killed Russell's viper *D. russelii* (Fig. 1). Due no doubt to being repeatedly run over, the carcass of *D. russelii* was firmly adhered to the road. The approximate length of the cobra was 120 cm and *D. russelii* 80 cm and it was apparent that it was experiencing some difficulty removing the carcass in attempt to swallow it (Fig. 2). After consumption the *N. naja* disappeared into roadside bushes. Our observation of the feeding event was over 8 minutes but one-third of the viper was already consumed when we arrived and hence the total feeding period was longer. The present observation highlights the increased risk of mortality from traffic from snakes feeding on road-killed animals due to



Figure 1. Spectacled cobra in the early stages of consumption of road-killed viper



Figure 2. The feeding event almost complete. See text for details.

the increased time they must spend on the road surface. To our knowledge, there has been no previous report of road scavenging in *N. naja*, so our observation is the first record of this novel behaviour in *N. naja*. The scavenging event was filmed and can be viewed on <https://youtu.be/QprTB4UYBIo>.

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