

Birth and neonate colouration of *Ahaetulla prasina* in north-east India

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The oriental vine snake, *Ahaetulla prasina* Boie, 1827, is a wide ranging Indo-Malayan species (Uetz et al., 2021) exhibiting polymorphic colouration, typically green but greyish, brownish or orange-yellowish (Amber et al., 2017; Das, 2018). It is an ovoviviparous species known to produce 4–10 neonates with total lengths of 240–490 mm (Das, 2018). In the past the colour of neonates has very rarely been commented upon although the only reference we are aware of states that they are light brown (Lim & Tat-Mong, 1989).

On 14 May 2020, an adult female snake measuring 1,320 mm in total length (snout-vent length 845 mm) was rescued from a cultivated field, Kawrthah, Mamit District,

Mizoram, north-east India (23.956772° N, 92.353856° E; 296 m a.s.l.). The gravid snake was monitored in captivity in a glass terrarium (60 cm length; 43 cm height; 23 cm width) at Mizoram University. On 24 Oct 2021, the female bearing a total of four neonates commenced parturition at around ca. 14:30 h and finished at ca. 18:30 h with the birth of each individual taking about 3–5 min. During birth, in each case the mid-body loop of the neonate was extruded first following gradual contraction of the female's belly (Fig. 1A–E). Soon after delivery to the ground, the neonates slithered out from the thin, gelatinous and translucent amniotic sac (Fig. 1F). After taking necessary biometric data (total length 408–450 mm; snout-vent length 270–287 mm; weight 3.40–3.71 g), the four neonates (Fig. 1G) and the adult female (Fig. 1H) were released back into the nearest forest from their collection site. Despite the female being a greenish morph, it gave birth to four greyish neonates; a similar condition was also observed earlier in another clutch (N=7) born on 25 September 2010 to a captive greenish adult male and female. These neonates were released after 151 days (23 February 2011) and by this time they had attained the greenish colour of the parents (Romalsawma, pers. obs.).

In some species of snake, it is not uncommon for neonates and juveniles to be a different colour from older life stages (e.g. green tree pythons, green cat snakes and king cobras). In some cases this has been correlated with differences in habitat preferences between the life stages. Further study would be of interest, especially to determine for *A. prasina* what the ecological correlates of this change might be.

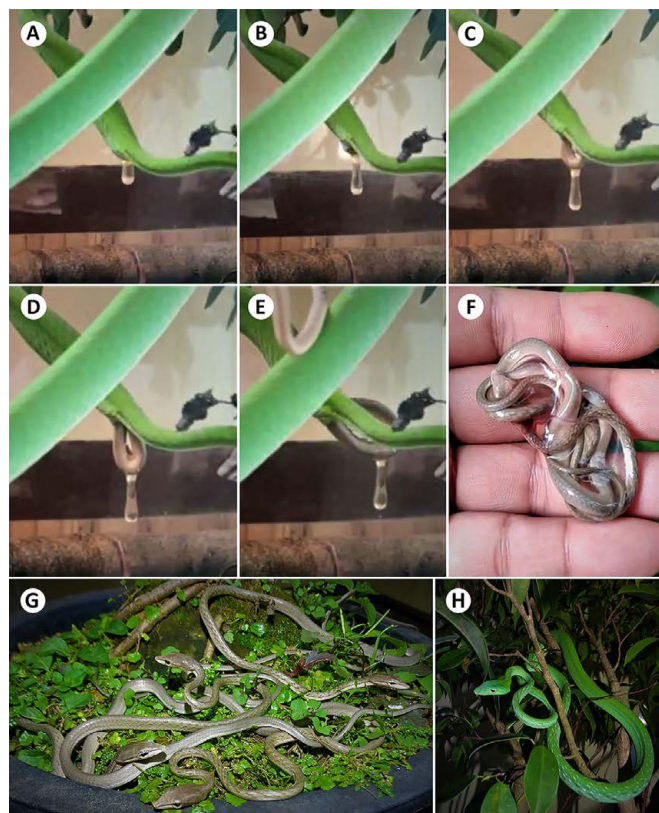


Figure 1. A female *Ahaetulla prasina* giving birth in captivity and the colouration of the neonates - **A–E**. A neonate emerging from the female, **F**. A neonate still within the amniotic sac, **G**. Four greyish neonates before they were released back into the wild, **H**. The female parent *A. prasina* prior to parturition

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