



## Banded Krait *Bungarus fasciatus* (Schneider, 1801) Diet- a Review, with a Case Study of a Banded Krait preying on Copper-headed Trinket Snake *Coelognathus radiatus* (Boie, 1827) in Dibrugarh, Assam (India)

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**ABSTRACT:** Present review of diet of Banded Krait *Bungarus fasciatus* (Schneider, 1801) shows that besides its partiality to ophidian diet of both venomous and non-venomous species including fellow Kraits and eggs of snakes, its diet consists of 'Small Mammals', 'Rodents', Rats, Chicken eggs, 'Lizards', Skinks (specifically *Eutropis multifasciata*, 'Amphibians', Frogs, Toads, and Fish. Reports of 25 species of prey snakes under 7 families, viz. Colubridae (12 sp.), Cyliophiidae (1 sp.), Elapidae (5 sp.), Homalopsidae (1 sp.), Pythonidae (2 sp. including one unconfirmed sp.), Viperidae (3 sp.) and Xenopeltidae (1 sp.) as food items are described. Banded Kraits scavenging for carcass/carrion of 4 species of snake and the diet of captive breeding individuals are also discussed. Photographic documentation of a very rare case of Banded Krait preying on a Copper-headed Trinket Snake *Coelognathus radiatus* (Boie, 1827) in Dibrugarh, Assam (India) is also reported.

**Keywords:** *Bungarus fasciatus*, diet, review, preying, *Coelognathus radiatus*.

### INTRODUCTION

Study of diet and trophic interactions in reptiles is very important for understanding ecological life history as well as for conservation strategies of the species concerned. Banded Krait (*Bungarus fasciatus*) feeds on other snakes as its principal food besides some terrestrial and aquatic vertebrate items including small mammals, eggs of birds and snakes, other reptiles, amphibians and fishes. Banded Krait is a 80% ophiophagus species (Slowinski, 1994). Food habit and diet of *Bungarus fasciatus* is said to be well documented (Luu & Ha 2018; Biakzuala *et al.*, 2019). However, more studies are required to fill certain gap of knowledge about the dietary patterns of this species (Thongproh *et al.*, 2020). In the present communication the reports of diet of Banded Krait is reviewed on the basis of original documentation, subsequent observation, experimentation and description in the books and research articles published in different Journals. A case study report of a rare event of Banded Krait preying on a Copper-headed Trinket Snake is also presented.

Modern literature related to diet and feeding strategies of Kraits in general and Banded Krait in particular can be traced in the works of Gunther (1864); Fayrer (1872); Simson (1886); Boulenger (1890); Primrose (1899) etc. in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and that of Evans (1902); Wall (1904, 1910, 1911); Smith (1943) etc. in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Different kinds of Snakes in groups as the diet of Banded Krait are fairly documented by various authors in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (BMNH, 1956; Bergman, 1962; Mao, 1970; Deoras, 1981; Slowinski, 1994; Daniel 2002; Sharma, 2007; Das, 2008; Whitaker and Captain 2008, Ahmed *et al.*, 2009, Srinivasulu *et al.*, 2009; Bharos 2013; Chan-ard *et al.*, 2015; Maurice, 2015; Rahman, 2015; Prakash, 2016; Das, 2018; Knierim *et al.*, 2019; Thongproh *et al.*, 2020; Padmakumar & Murugan 2022; Talukdar, 2024) etc.

Twenty five (25) species of snakes are identified as prey of Banded Krait. These are documented and described by various authors and in different published and unpublished works besides those of the authors of the 1<sup>st</sup> part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as mentioned above (Bergman, 1962; Saint, 1972; Biswas, 1984; Slowinski, 1994; Daniel, 2002; Whitaker and Captain 2008; Srinivasulu *et al.*, 2009; Whitaker, 2010; Bharos, 2013; Knierim *et al.*, 2017; Das, 2018; Luu and Ha 2018; Das *et al.*, 2019; Biakzuala *et al.*, 2019; Husain, 2020; Biakzuala *et al.*, 2021; Bose *et al.*, 2021; Kalita *et al.*, 2021; Subba *et al.*, 2023; Talukdar, 2024; Borkataki, 2025 etc.)

Banded Kraits scavenging for carcass/carrion other snakes are also documented and described by various authors (DeVault and Krochmal 2002; Knierim *et al.*, 2017; Biakzuala *et al.*, 2019; Biakzuala *et al.*, 2021; Kane *et al.*, 2021; Deka *et al.*, 2024; Talukdar, 2024 etc.).

Prey of a Banded Krait normally die within 10-20 minutes after being seized due to both envenomation and suffocation caused by mechanical work of the jaws (Whitaker, 2010). It is swallowed head first, after it has been rendered inactive or dead (Daniel, 2002). Sometimes considerable portion of a longer prey (snake) remains outside protruding beyond the mouth for a day or two until the portion in the stomach is liquefied by digestion (Simson, 1886; Wall, 1904, 1910, 1911; Daniel, 2002). There is a report of *Ptyas mucosus* seen protruding 425.45mm out of the mouth of a Banded Krait (Wall 1910, 1911). There is another example of Banded Krait with a prey snake nearly as long as the Krait in its intestine and only the tail was out of the krait's mouth (Simson, 1886). Slowinski (1994) presented dietary information of 112 individuals of 9 species of Kraits including *Bungarus fasciatus*, based on his own study (X-raying and dissecting specimens) and available published works of other workers and unpublished reports. Luu and Ha (2018); Biakzuala *et al.* (2019); Husain (2020) are among the authors to outline the diet of Banded Krait with mention of different species of prey snakes. Thongproh *et al.* (2020) described various methods for investigating diet of snakes.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

Banded Krait, *Bungarus fasciatus* (Schneider, 1801) is one of the 18 described species of the genus *Bungarus* (Squamata: Elapidae) is a terrestrial, nocturnal venomous snake species. This species is distinguished from other snakes by its equally spaced alternate black

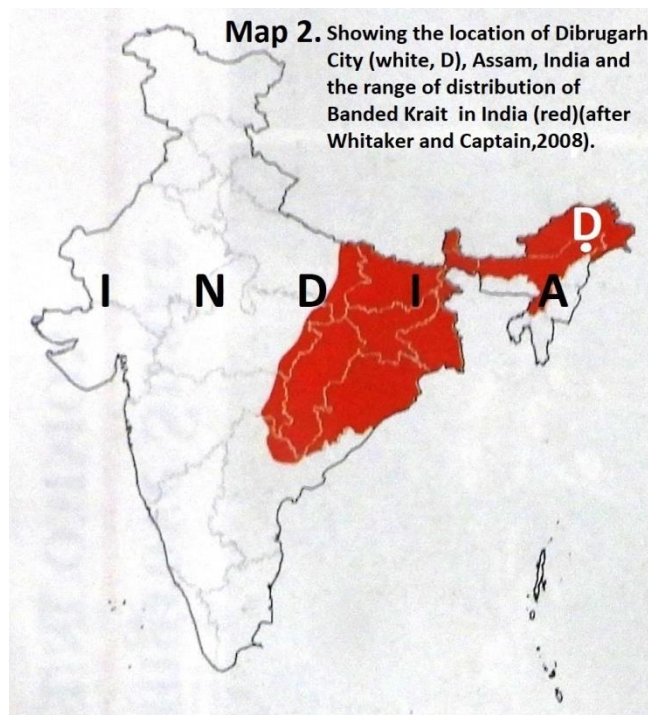
and yellow (or white or pale brown) transverse bands, a triangular body in cross section and prominent vertebral ridge and short and blunt tail. It has a maximum total length of 2,250mm (Whitaker and Captain 2008). Banded Krait is a snake of South and Southeast Asian countries including India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, S.China, Cambodia, Darussalam, Indonesia, Laos, Macau, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam (Wallach *et al.*, 2014; Uetz *et al.*, 2025). In Indian limits this species is distributed in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal (Whitaker and Captain 2008) (Map 2).

Copper-headed Trinket Snake, *Coelognathus radiatus* (Boie, 1827) (Squamata: Colubridae) is a non venomous, diurnal and terrestrial species that can swim and climb well. This species can be distinguished from other species by its copper brown head with three radiating black streaks from below and behind the eye and a black line across the nape. Dorsum greyish or yellowish brown or fawn with four black stripes along the fore body. Its maximum total length is 2300mm (Whitaker and Captain 2008). This species is also found in South and Southeast Asian countries that include India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, S. China, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, West Malaysia, Singapore, East Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia (Wallach *et al.*, 2014; Uetz *et al.*, 2025).

The case study report of the event of a Banded Krait preying on a Copper-headed Trinket Snake is based on a field observation of the act of predation that happened on 04.06.2015 at a place (27.487968°N, 94.959993°E) in Hiloidhari Village, close to Dibrugarh City, Assam (India) (Map 1). The event was an unsuccessful predation where the Banded Krait after efforts of hours together could not swallow the prey completely and regurgitated it and left the place. The dead prey (the Copper-headed Trinket Snake) was taken to the laboratory of the Department of Zoology of D.H.S.K. College, dissected and preserved along with the rat, on which the Trinket Snake preyed before itself fell prey to the Banded Krait.



**Map 1.** Hiloidhari Village near Dibrugarh City. location of the place ‘B’ (27.487968°N, 94.959993°E) where Banded Krait preying on Copper-headed Trinket Snake was observed.



**Map 2.** Showing the location of Dibrugarh City (white, D), Assam, India and the range of distribution of Banded Krait in Indian limits (red) (after Whitaker and Captain 2008).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of review of the diet of the genus *Bungarus* and the species *Bungarus fasciatus* is presented as documented and described by various authors since Gunther's work in 1864 to the works of modern herpetologists till 2024. The review shows that although the diet includes different terrestrial and aquatic vertebrates and some ophidian and non ophidian materials, Banded Krait shows a great partiality to ophidian diet exhibiting its cannibalistic nature. The case study presented here describes an unusual prey species of Banded Krait i.e. Copper-headed Trinket Snake as documented in Dibrugarh, Assam by the present author.

Result and discussion of the present work is presented in two parts-

**(1) Result of review of documented works of diet of *Bungarus fasciatus*.**

**(2) Result of case study of a Banded Krait preying on Copper-headed Trinket snake.**

**(i) Diet of Kraits:** Diet of Kraits (Genus *Bungarus*) in general consists of 'small animals', small mammals, lizards, snakes, frogs, toads and fish.

**(ii) Snakes in groups and ophidian items as diet of Banded Krait:** These include Cat Snake, Cobra, *Cylindrophis*, *Enhydris* sp., Grass Snake, *Homalopsis*, Kraits, Pythons, Rat Snake, Tree Snake, Vine Snake, Water Snake, *Xenochrophis* sp. and Eggs of snakes. Primrose (1899) reported Grass Snake as prey from Bagh o Bahar Tea Estate Village in Silchar, Assam, India. Wall (1910) reported snake eggs as diet of Banded Krait in Assam and a case report of probable eggs of *Amphiesma stolatum* (Wall, 1911).

**(iii) Twenty five (25) species of snakes as prey of Banded Krait:** Table 1 Shows 25 species of snakes documented and described as diet of Banded Krait

under 7 families including Colubridae (12 sp.), Cylindrophiiidae (1 sp.), Elapidae (4 sp.), Homalopsidae. (1 sp.), Pythonidae (2sp. including one unconfirmed sp.), Viperidae (3sp.), and Xenopeltidae (1 sp.) and three unidentified prey snakes. Localities of some prey snake species are also described in literature. Wall (1910) reported *Amphiesma stolatum* as a prey species from Assam and Srinivasulu *et al.* (2009) from Butaram Tank, Warangal District, Andhra Pradesh, India. *Boiga ochracea* was reported from Buichali Bridge, Sairang Road, Mizoram, India (Biakzuala *et al.*, 2019). Das *et al.* (2019) reported *Coelognathus helena* as prey species from Assam, India. *Fowlea piscator* was documented as prey species in Rangoon, Myanmar (Evans, 1902) and in Ormanjhi, Ranchi District, Jharkhand, India (Husain, 2020). *Ptyas korros* was documented as prey species from Assam, India (Wall 1910, 1911). *Bungarus caeruleus* was documented as prey species from Tapkara Village in Chhattisgarh, India on the basis of a report published in a Hindi daily dated 4<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2012 (Bharos, 2013). *Bungarus lividus* was reported as prey species from Railghumti locality, Coach Behar, W.B., India (Bose *et al.*, 2021) and Dakhala, Kamrup dist. Assam, India (Kalita *et al.*, 2021). True cannibalism in Banded Krait preying upon fellow Banded Krait (*Bungarus fasciatus*) was reported from Beseria Sopura Chuburi Kalita Village, Assam, India, supported by videography (Borkataki, 2025). *Python bivittatus* was documented as a probable prey species of Banded Krait (Husain 2020). Luu and Ha (2018) reported *Ovophis tonkinensis* as prey species of Banded Krait from Tam Thanh Cpmune, Quan Son District, Thanh Hoa Province, Vietnun. *Trimeresurus erythrurus* was documented as prey species from New Khawlek, Lunglei District, Mizoram, India (Biakzuala *et al.*, 2021). There are single mentions of some prey



species including *Coelognathus radiatus* Copper-headed Trinket Snake (Husain, 2020).

**(iv) Banded Krait as scavenger:** There are reports of some individuals of Banded Krait scavenging for carcass /carriions of some species of snakes etc. There are reports of different scavenger snakes with not less than 50 observations in field and laboratory including 35 species of dead snakes as food material (DeVault and Krochmal 2002). Banded Kraits are found scavenging for *Fowlea piscator*, *Enhydris enhydris*, *Cylindrophis ruffus* and *Trimeresurus cardamomensis* (Table 1).

**(v) Animals other than Snakes:** Animals and animal items other than Snakes as diet of *Bangarus fasciatus* are also documented and described by various authors. Such food items include ‘Small mammals’, ‘Rodents’, Rats, Chicken eggs, Lizards, Skinks (specifically *Eutropis multifasciata*), ‘Amphibians’, Frogs, Toads and Fish. There are records of *Eutropis multifasciata* and fish as food item of Banded Krait from Assam, India (Wall 1910, 1911).

**(vi) Diet of Captive Banded Kraits:** In captivity Banded Kraits are seen to eat Water Snakes and young Rats. In venomous snake husbandry both adult and neonates of captive Banded Kraits are fed with Striped Snake-head Fish (*Channa striatus*), Spotted Spiny Eel (*Macrognathus siamensis*), pieces of eel meat, non venomous snakes (viz. *Enhydris* sp., *Coelognathus radiatus*, *Fowlea piscator*, and *Ptyas korros*), geckos, lizards, frogs, checks and laboratory Mice. Neonates are also fed with homemade sausages. However, according to Slowinski (1994) diet records of captive Kraits may not accurately reflect the diet in the wild.

## **(2) Banded Krait predating a Copper-headed Trinket snake- a case study:**

Documentation of an incident of Banded Krait *Bungarus fasciatus* preying on a Copper-headed Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus radiatus*) in Dibrugarh, Assam

(India) is presented in this part. The place of the incident was the floor of a rice grain storage cum cowshed of a household (27.487968°N, 94.959993°E) in Hiloidhari Village besides Ethelwood Tea Estate towards the east of Assam Medical College, Dibrugarh City, in the Dibrugarh East Revenue Circle, Dist. Dibrugarh, Assam, India. On 04.06.2015 early morning a Banded Krait managed to get hold of a 1250 mm. long Copper-headed Trinket Snake in the place mentioned above and started swallowing as reported. There was a call for rescue of snake (if needed). The present author and Mr. Parag Baruah, one of the associates in rescue of snakes in Dibrugarh arrived the site and observed the later part of the incident for 49 minutes from 6.25 hrs to 7.14 hrs. The event was photographed and videographed from distance not to disturb the predator. At first the Banded Krait was seen in an upright position swallowing the anterior 1/3<sup>rd</sup> part of the body of the Trinket Snake reaching an enlarged part nearly in the mid body (Fig. 1) containing a prey inside, which was later revealed to be a rat (Fig. 6). The Banded Krait was trying its best to swallow beyond that part of the prey in upright position. The predator later turned upside down (Fig. 2) to make swallowing easier. But it could not proceed swallowing beyond the enlarged part of the body of the Trinket Snake. Even efforts once again in upright position (Fig. 3) the Krait failed to continue swallowing beyond the enlarged part (Fig. 4). In fact, he nocturnal predator could not complete its preying successfully in darkness. The Banded Krait later regurgitated the swallowed part (Fig. 5) of the Trinket Snake and left the place. The dead Trinket snake was transported to the Zoology laboratory of D.H.S.K. College, dissected to examine the gut content and it was found that the Trinket Snake had a meal of a rat (Fig. 6) before it fell prey to the Banded Krait.

**Table 1: List of 24 prey snake species of Banded Krait, *Bungarus fasciatus* (Schneider, 1801) (\* documented cases of Banded Krait scavenging for carcass/carrion of 4 species of snakes).**

Family	Sr. No.	Name of prey species	References
(i) Colubridae	1	<i>Ahaetula nasuta</i> (Lacepede, 1789) Common Vine snake	(Husain, 2020)
	2	<i>Amphiesma stolatum</i> (Linnaeus, 1758) Buff-striped Keelback	(Wall, 1910; Slowinski, 1994; Daniel, 2002; Srinivasulu <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Luu and Ha 2018; Biakzuala <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Husain, 2020; Talukdar, 2024)
	3	<i>Boiga cynodon</i> (Boie, 1827) Dog-toothed Cat Snake	(Wall, 1911)
	4	<i>Boiga ochracea</i> (Theobald, 1868) Tawny Cat Snake	(Biakzuala <i>et al.</i> , 2019)
	5	<i>Boiga trigonata</i> (Schneider, 1802) Common Cat Snake	(Luu and Ha 2018; Biakzuala <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Husain, 2020; Talukdar, 2024)
	6	<i>Coelognathus helena</i> (Daudin, 1803) Common Trinket Snake	(Das <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Husain, 2020)
	7	<i>Coelognathus radiatus</i> (Boie, 1827) Copper-headed Trinket Snake	(Husain, 2020)
	8	<i>Dendrelaphis tristis</i> (Daudin, 1803) Common Bronze-back	(Wall, 1911; Husain, 2020)
	9 *	<i>Fowlea piscator</i> (Schneider, 1799) Checkered Keelback	(Evans, 1902; Wall, 1911; Saint, 1972; Biswas, 1984; Slowinski, 1994; Daniel, 2002; Das, 2018; Luu and Ha 2018; Biakzuala <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Husain, 2020; Deka <i>et al.</i> , 2024; Talukdar, 2024)

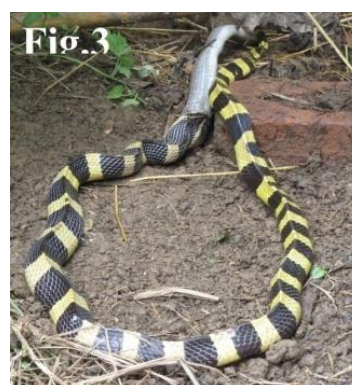
	10	<i>Ptyas korros</i> (Schlegel,1837) Indo-Chinese Rat Snake	(Wall, 1910; 1911; Slowinski, 1994; Daniel, 2002; Luu and Ha 2018; Biakzuala <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Husain, 2020; Talukdar, 2024)
	11	<i>Ptyas mucosa</i> (Linnaeus 1758) Oriental Rat Snake	(Wall, 1910; 1911; Slowinski, 1994; Daniel, 2002; Luu and Ha 2018; Biakzuala <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Husain, 2020; Talukdar, 2024)
	12	<i>Xenochrophis vittatus</i> (Linnaeus 1758) Striped Keelback	(Bergman, 1962; Slowinski, 1994)
(ii) Cylindrophidae	13 *	<i>Cylindrophis ruffus</i> (Laurenti, 1768) Red-tailed Pipe Snake	(Knierim <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Luu and Ha 2018; Biakzuala <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Talukdar, 2024)
(iii) Elapidae	14	<i>Bungarus caeruleus</i> (Schneider,1801) Common Krait	(Whitaker and Captain 2008; Whitaker, 2010; Bharos 2013; Husain, 2020; Biakzuala <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Subba <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Talukdar, 2024)
	15	<i>Bungarus fasciatus</i> (Schneider,1801) Banded Krait	(Borkataki, 2025)
	16	<i>Bungarus lividus</i> Cantor,1839, Lesser Black Krait	(Bose <i>et al.</i> 2021; Kalita <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Subba <i>et al.</i> , 2023; Talukdar, 2024)
	17	<i>Bungarus walli</i> Wall 1907 Wall's Krait	Subba <i>et al.</i> 2023; Talukdar, 2024.
	18	<i>Naja naja</i> (Linnaeus, 1758) Binocellate Cobra.	(Husain, 2020)
(iv) Homalopsidae	19 *	<i>Enhydryis enhydryis</i> (Schneider, 1799) Rainbow Water Snake	(Knierim <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Luu and Ha 2018; Biakzuala <i>et al.</i> 2019; Husain 2020; Talukdar, 2024)
(v) Pythonidae	20	<i>Python bivittatus</i> Khul, 1820 Burmese Python	'may be'- Husain (2020)
	21	<i>Python molurus</i> (Linnaeus 1758) Indian Python	(Husain, 2020)
(vi) Viperidae	22	<i>Daboia russelii</i> (Shaw and Nodder 1797) Russell's Viper	(Luu and Ha 2018; Biakzuala <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Luu and Ha 2018; Husain, 2020; Talukdar 2024)
	23	<i>Ovophis tonkinensis</i> (Bourret, 1934) Tonkin Pit Viper	(Luu and Ha 2018; Biakzuala <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Talukdar, 2024)
	24	<i>Trimeresurus erythrurus</i> (Cantor, 1839) Redtail (bamboo) Pit-viper	(Biakzuala <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Talukdar, 2024)
(vii) Xenopeltidae-	25	<i>Xenopeltis unicolor</i> Reinwardt, 1827 Sunbeam Snake.	(Luu and Ha 2018; Biakzuala <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Husain 2020; Talukdar, 2024)
-	-	Three unidentified Snakes	(Wall, 1910; Slowinski, 1994)
	*	<i>Trimeresurus cardamomensis</i> (Malhotra, Thorpe, Mrinalini and Stuart 2011) Cardamom Mountains Green Pitviper	(Kane <i>et al.</i> , 2021)



**Fig. 1.** 9.30 hrs. The predator trying to swallow the enlarged portion of the prey snake.



**Fig. 2.** 9.35 hrs. The predator turns upside down to make swallowing easier.



**Fig. 3.** 9.46 hrs. The Banded krait trying again in upright position.



**Fig. 4.** 9.53 hrs. The predator fails to swallow the enlarged portion of the Trinket snake.



**Fig. 5.** 10.03 hrs. The Banded krait regurgitating the swallowed part of the Trinket Snake.



**Fig. 6.** The Rat dissected out from the gut of the Trinket snake.

## CONCLUSIONS

Banded Kraits are mainly snake eaters. Different groups of snakes and snake items as diet of Banded Krait include Cat Snakes, *Cylindrophis*, *Enhydris*, Grass Snake, *Homalopsis*, *Python*, Rat Snake, Vine Snake, Tree Snake, Water Snake, *Xenochrophis*, some unidentified snakes and snake eggs. There are records of 24 species of snakes including an unconfirmed species in the diet list of Banded Krait under 7 families, viz., Colubridae (12 sp.), Cylindrophidae (1 sp.), Elapidae (4 sp.), Homalopsidae. (1 sp.), Pythonidae (2sp. including one unconfirmed species), Viperidae (3sp.) and Xenopeltidae (1 sp.) besides three unidentified species. Carcass/carrion of at least four species of snake viz. *Fowlea piscator*, *Enhydris enhydris*, *Cylindrophis ruffus* and *Trimeresurus cardamomensis* are there in the diet list of Banded Krait. The non ophidian food items of Banded Krait include 'small mammals', Rats, Mice, Chicken eggs, 'Lizards', Skinks, 'Amphibians', Frogs, Toads, and Fishes. Some ophidian and other items are served as food to captive Banded Kraits.

Banded Kraits (*Bungarus fasciatus*) predating a Copper-headed Trinket Snake (*Coelognathus radiatus*) is a very rare phenomenon with just a single mention in available literature (Husain, 2020). The present report of Banded Krait predating a Copper-headed Trinket Snake may be the 1<sup>st</sup> photographic and videographic documentation of this very rare phenomenon.

## FUTURE SCOPE

Being rare species very little is known about the diet and natural history of two sympatric species of Banded Krait viz. Greater Black Krait (*Bungarus niger*) and Lesser Black Krait (*Bungarus lividus*) (Sharma, 2007; Whitaker and Captain 2008; Ahmed *et al.*, 2009; Bhattacharjee and Sarkar 2021; Ray and Pandey 2020). Study of the diet and natural history of Banded Krait in natural or captive condition can help herpetologists to understand diet and natural history of these three sympatric Krait species and help the conservationists in conservation and management practice of these species.

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