



A Centipede (*Scolopendra dehaani*) Feeding on a Juvenile Andaman Wolfsnake (*Lycodon hypsirrhinoides*) on Havelock Island, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, India

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Centipedes prey primarily on insects but also are known to feed on small vertebrates, including amphibians, lizards, snakes, birds, bats, and rodents (Lewis 1981; Molinari et al. 2005; Srbek-Araujo et al. 2012; Noronha et al. 2015; Siriwut et al. 2016). Herein we provide the first record of predation on a juvenile Andaman Wolfsnake (*Lycodon hypsirrhinoides*) by a large centipede (*Scolopendra dehaani*) and the first account

of a scolopendrid feeding on an endemic island snake species in India.

The Andaman Wolfsnake is endemic to the Andaman Islands, where it is known as “Patti walla shaap” (= Leaf-litter Snake). This nocturnally active terrestrial species usually is found near forest streams but also is frequently encountered around human dwellings; it is non-venomous and typically



Fig. 1. A centipede (*Scolopendra dehaani*) feeding on a juvenile Andaman Wolfsnake (*Lycodon hypsirrhinoides*). Photographs by Nariman Vazifdar.

preys on frogs, geckos, and skinks (Whitaker and Captain 2004). *Scolopendra dehaani* is among the largest species in the genus (~25 cm body length; Siriwut et al. 2016). This species, which can deliver a painful bite to humans that can be fatal in infants (Khanna 2003), is common in the Andaman Islands, particularly during the monsoon season.

At ~2030 h on 4 June 2021 at Radhanagar Beach, Havelock Island, Andaman Islands, India, NV traced an unusual scratching noise to his front porch, where he located an approximately 17-cm-long centipede attacking an approximately 8-cm-long Andaman Wolfsnake (Fig. 1). The centipede had grasped the snake immediately behind its head. Although it thrashed vigorously, it was unable to free itself. After approximately 20 min, the centipede managed to use its legs to immobilize the snake. The centipede then started to eat the snake while it was still moving. Starting at the head, although the eyes were not eaten, the centipede had worked its way to the snake's midbody, when it was disturbed and dragged the remains of the snake into the undergrowth.

The Andaman Islands are characterized by unique island ecology, including a paucity of medium and large mammals and a relatively high diversity and abundance of endemic reptiles (Rao et al. 2013). The islands also are known for the abundance of centipedes, which are reputed to be larger than mainland conspecifics (R. Whitaker, pers. comm.). An atypical abundance of small terrestrial snakes and large centipedes is corroborated by comparative night surveys carried out by the authors on the Andaman Islands and elsewhere in India. Trophic interactions between large centipedes and small

snakes may be an evolutionary driver for gigantism and species divergence in the Andaman Islands.

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