REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

A Leucistic Checkered Keelback (*Fowlea piscator*) Entangled in Plastic Netting in Valsad, Gujarat, India

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The Checkered Keelback, *Fowlea piscator* (Schneider 1799), is widely dispersed throughout southern Asia, where it occurs along rivers, ponds, and paddy fields (Wallach et al. 2014). It is one of the most frequently encountered aquatic snakes and possibly the most abundant snake in India (Whitaker and Captain 2004). These snakes are extremely active, capable of jumping off the ground and swimming nimbly in water (Daniel 2002). They eat frog eggs, tadpoles, frogs, fish, rodents, and occasionally birds (Whitaker and Captain 2005).

Fig. 1. A leucistic Checkered Keelback (*Fowlea piscator*) entangled in a gillnet in Shankartalav, Valsad, Gujarat, India. Photographs by Aadit Patel.

At about 1600 h on 25 January 2022 in Shankartalav, Valsad, Gujarat, India (20.675814°N, 72.936238°E), we received a rescue call for a snake entangled in a gillnet. Upon reaching the site, we found a leucistic Checkered Keelback (Fig. 1).

Leucism is a congenital hypopigmentation condition, characterized by a partial lack of pigmentation that, unlike albinism, does not affect the pigment cells in the eyes (Bechtel 1995). Because such color abnormalities have a deleterious impact on fitness (Krecsák 2008), survival rates of leucistic individuals are low, causing them to be readily eliminated from communities.

Macroplastics of various types are known to cause harm to individual animals and populations (e.g., Stuart and Watson 2001; Kapfer and Paloski 2011; Blettler and Mitchell 2021). Plastic netting has been reported as an entanglement hazard (e.g., Twedt 1980; Bradford et al. 1991; Fuller-Perrine and Tobin 1993) and many cases of net-trapped snakes occur regularly in India (e.g., Muthukumaran et al. 2015; Sindha et al. 2020; Vyas and Patel 2020; and references cited therein).

Fig. 2. A leucistic Checkered Keelback (*Fowlea piscator*) after being rescued from entanglement in a gillnet. Photograph by Aadit Patel.

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