



Death-feigning Behavior by a Spectacled Cobra, *Naja naja* (Linnaeus 1758) (Squamata: Elapidae)

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Death feigning (also known as thanatosis, catalepsy, or tonic immobility) is a form of defensive behavior in which an animal pretends to be dead by maintaining a rigid posture or by simulating fully relaxed muscles when threatened or attacked by a predator (Greene 1988; Vogel and Han-Yuen 2010). Relatively few reports document thanatosis in southern Asian snakes: Checkered Keelback, *Fowlea piscator* (MacDonald 1947; Vogel and Han-Yuen 2010); Copper-headed Trinket Snake, *Coelognathus radiatus* (Vogel and Han-Yuen 2010; Giri et al. 2020; Nadolski et al. 2020); Common Wolfsnake, *Lycodon aulicus* (Mirza et al. 2011; Deshmukh et al. 2020); Oriental Wolfsnake, *Lycodon capucinus* (Mirza et al. 2011); Yellow-collared Wolfsnake, *Lycodon flavicollis* (Muliya et al. 2018); Chanard’s Reedsnake, *Macrocalamus chanardi* (Vogel and Han-Yuen 2010); Banded

Racer, *Platyceps plinii* (Ramani and Trivedi 2021); Large-eyed False Cobra, *Pseudoxenodon macrops* (Bhosale and Thite 2013); Burmese Python, *Python bivittatus* (Bhattarai et al. 2017); and Common Sandboa, *Eryx conicus* (Deshmukh et al. 2020).

The Spectacled Cobra (*Naja naja*) (Fig. 1) is a venomous elapid that ranges throughout most of mainland India (excluding the Northeast), Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and possibly eastern Afghanistan (Uetz et al. 2021), where it inhabits a variety of natural habitats but also cultivated land and even human habitations (Daniel 2002; Whitaker and Captain 2004). Herein we report the first record of thanatosis by a Spectacled Cobra.

When alarmed, the first response of *Naja naja* is rapid retreat; however, if unable to flee, an individual will spread



Fig. 1. A Spectacled Cobra (*Naja naja*) hooding (left) and feigning death (right). Photographs by Pravesh Kumar.

its hood, erect one-third of its body, and hiss loudly; if disturbed further, it might strike or bite (Daniel 2002). On 24 April 2016, PK rescued a Spectacled Cobra from a residential area in Hardoi, Uttar Pradesh, India (27°22'52"N, 80°06'57"E). During the rescue operation, the snake was cornered in a house and, while bagging it, the cobra feigned death. Unfortunately, due to panic among the local residents gathered at the rescue site, the snake was rescued quickly and the death-feigning behavior was not documented. However, when released, it again feigned death, becoming immobile and inverting its body (Fig. 2). Although mostly relaxed, the nuchal region was intermittently stiff and the head was oriented upward. After remaining undisturbed for 50–60 s, it slowly righted its body and quickly left the site. Similar behavior was observed by KT in 2014 in Surat, Gujarat but it was not documented for lack of a camera.

Thanatosis has been reported from the congeneric Egyptian Cobra (*Naja haje*) (Dickinson 1948) and the Black-necked Spitting Cobra (*Naja nigricollis*) from South Africa (Ionides 1952), but this is the first report of this behavior in a Spectacled Cobra.

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