

2. **Cantor's Water Snake, *Cantoria violacea* Girard; a Vertebrate New to the Fauna of Thailand.**

Whilst walking across an exposed extensive tidal mud flat at Sapan Hin, Phuket Town suburbs, Phuket Island, western peninsular Thailand (7°53'N., 98°24'E.) on 20 October 1977 at 18.00 hours J.B. found a snake, rather sea snake-like in appearance but with a round tail, with its head and anterior quarter of its body down a vertical crab burrow of slightly smaller diameter than that of the snake. The tide was low and the snake had apparently been stranded on the hot mud and had therefore sought the shelter and moisture of the crab burrow. The snake was not disturbed initially, but was seen to be slowly extracting itself from the burrow; perhaps because it no longer required shelter due to the dropping evening temperature.

The snake was collected live, and made no attempt to bite or open its mouth during capture. Upon later close examination, the possibility of the specimen being Cantor's Water Snake, *Cantoria violacea*, was made immediately obvious by the very slender elongate body and correspondingly high number of ventral scales. Measurements and scale counts of our specimen, and the known variation of these characters within the species (TWEEDIE, 1957: 91) are given below, and its dorsal and ventral appearance is illustrated in Plate II. The photographs in Plate I were taken immediately after death and prior to preservation. The characters of this specimen leave no doubt as to its identification, which has been confirmed by Dr. R.F. Inger.

Colours of our specimen in life were as follows: Entire body length dorsally blackish-brown with 89 transverse dirty pale yellow bands, 17 of which are on the tail; these bands being darker, brownish-yellow, centrally and less distinct on the posterior body than on the anterior body and tail. The transverse bands are wider dorso-laterally and meet the creamy-buff colouration of the outer three scale rows and ventrals. Scale edges of the outer three scale rows irregularly smudged blackish. Some ventral scales irregularly blotched centrally with small blackish markings. Subcaudal scales strongly edged black, this pigmentation forming a conspicuous black central line down the basal

part of the undertail. Crown of head black with irregular dark sandy-yellow blotches, Upper lip (labials) pale yellow; lower lip duller than upper, being more creamy-buff like the ventrals.

Five upper labials; third and fourth below eye but separated from it by a preocular and subocular scale. Scale counts of the Phuket specimen with the known range (TWEEDIE, 1957) in parenthesis follow: Ventrals 276 (260-291), paired subcaudals 57 (53-57), anal divided, scales in 19 rows.

Cantor's Water Snake has not previously been recorded in Thailand. Its discovery was forecast by Taylor (1965), however, who stated that its range extended from Burma to Malaya, and that therefore the species "doubtless will be discovered along the west coast" of Thailand. Taylor similarly foresaw the discovery of the Amphibious Sea Snake *Laticauda colubrina* (FRITH, 1974 : 209) and the sea snake *Hydrophis spiralis* (FRITH, 1977b : 340) on the west coast of Thailand.

The finding of Cantor's Water Snake on Phuket raises to twenty seven the number of snake species definitely known to exist on this island (FRITH, 1977a, and this issue). Colour photographs of this snake, taken in life, are deposited at the British Museum (Natural History).

We are grateful to Dr. R.F. Inger for confirming our identification of the snake.

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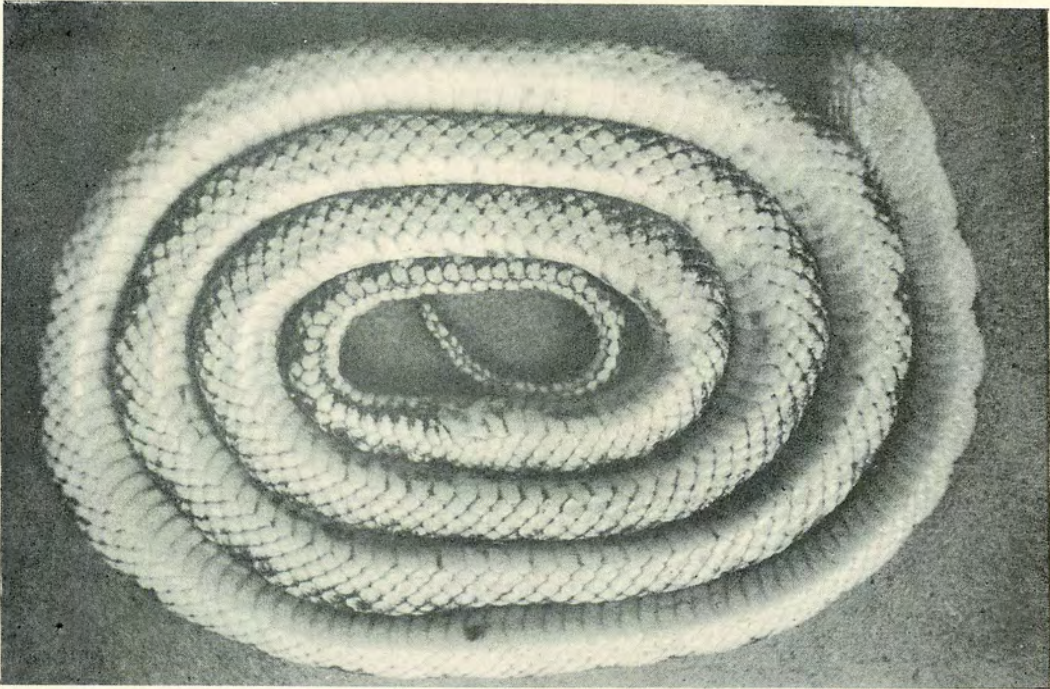
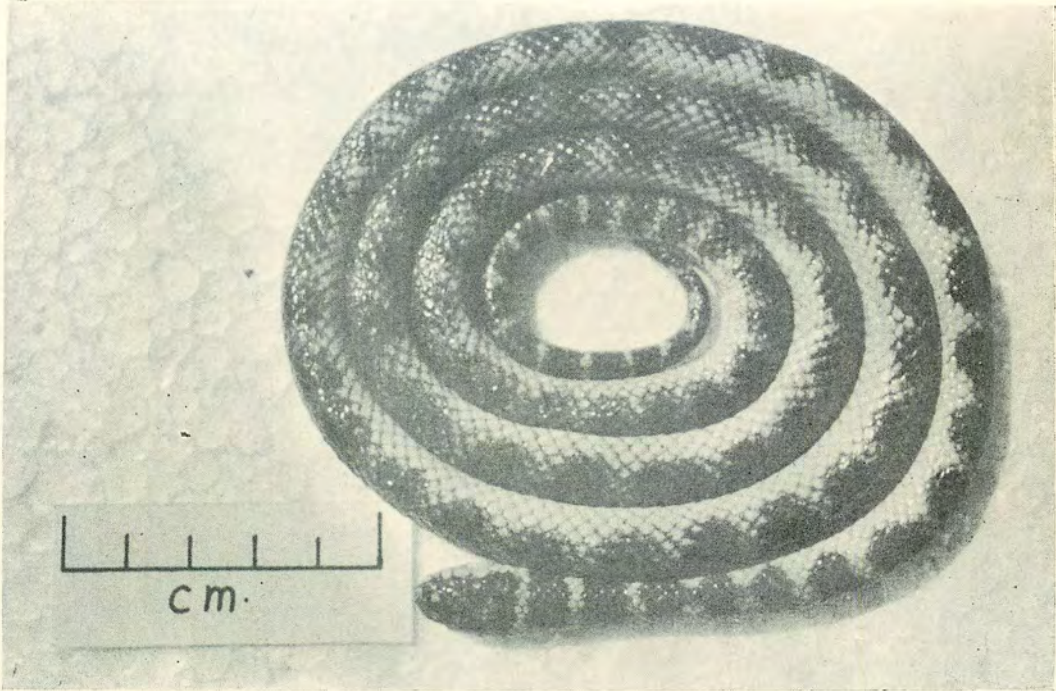
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Specimen of Cantor's Water Snake *Cantoria violacea* from Sapan Hin, Phuket Town, Phuket Island, western peninsular Thailand. Above, dorsal view; below ventral view.

