

3. The Crab-Eating Water Snake, *Fordonia leucobalia* (Schleg.); Another Snake New To Thailand.

The coastal locality of Saphan Hin, Phuket Town suburbs, Phuket Island, western peninsular Thailand, was visited at 1830 hours on 3 November 1977 and snakes were collected on the mangrove shore mud flats (exposed at low tides) by torchlight for one hour. Ten to fifteen Dog-faced Water Snakes, *Cerberus rhynchops*, were seen and six of them were collected as well as a small specimen of an unidentified snake unfamiliar to us. The latter snake was placed in a cage with a Golden Flying Snake, *Chrysopelea ornata*, which ate it during the night. The following morning the small snake was recovered from the flying snake and close examination of the partly digested remains suggested it was a Crab-eating Water Snake, *Fordonia leucobalia*.

As the Crab-eating Water Snake is reported as unknown in Thailand (TAYLOR, 1965) we revisited the Saphan Hin shore on 11 November 1977 at 1915 hours and CBF collected for only twenty minutes. During that time six specimens of the Crab-eating Water Snake were found, all lying on the wet mud surface. None of them attempted to bite when collected or during subsequent handling, but when initially approached they attempted to dive into the soft mud or down a crab burrow. It is remarkable that, whilst on 3 November many Dog-faced Water Snakes and only one Crab-eating Water Snake were seen, on 11 November no Dog-faced Water Snakes were seen at exactly the same spot as previously visited. It is particularly noteworthy that the Dog-faced, Crab-eating, and Cantor's (FRITH & BOSWALL, 1978) Water Snakes are all members of the subfamily Homalopsinae (family Colubridae) and were all found occurring sympatrically on the Saphan Hin mud flats. Moreover, all of them were observed to burrow into the mud and/or enter crab burrows, suggesting the three species are of similar ecological niches.

Scale counts and other details of the six Phuket specimens of the Crab-eating Water Snake, and the known variation of these characters, are given in Table 1. These data leave no doubt as to the iden-

tification of the specimens, as *Fordonia* is a distinct and monotypic genus. All specimens have five upper labials, the third touching the eye and the fifth the largest, as described for the species by TWEEDIE (1957:91); and in all specimens the anal scale is divided.

Table 1. Measurements (in millimetres) and scalation details of six specimens of the Crab-eating Water Snake, *Fordonia leucobalia* (Schleg.) from Phuket Island, Thailand.

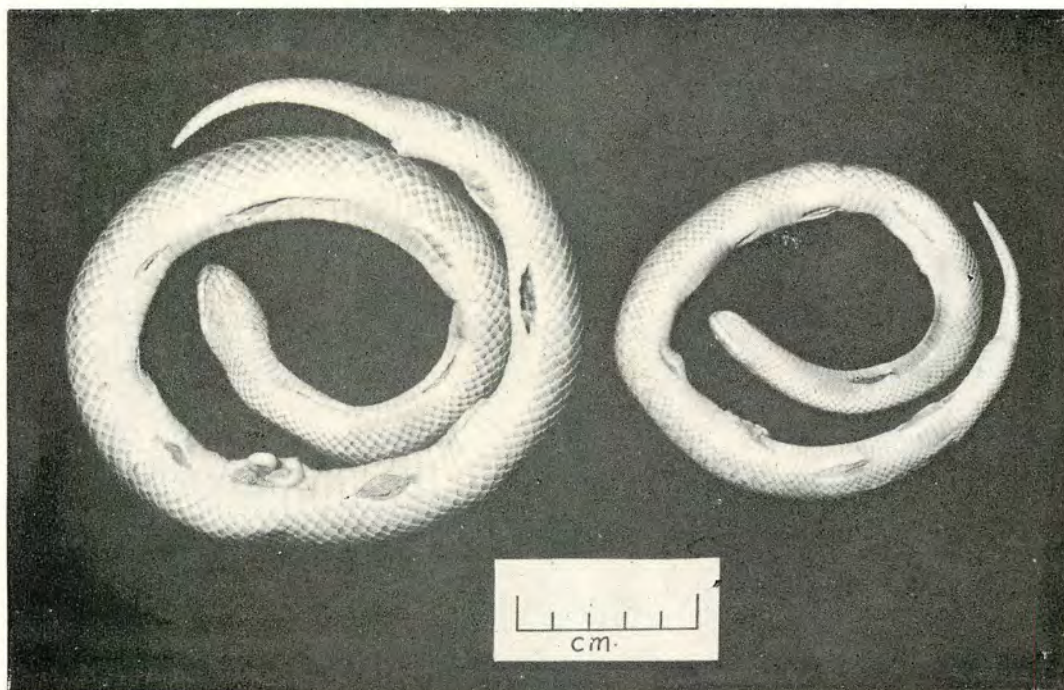
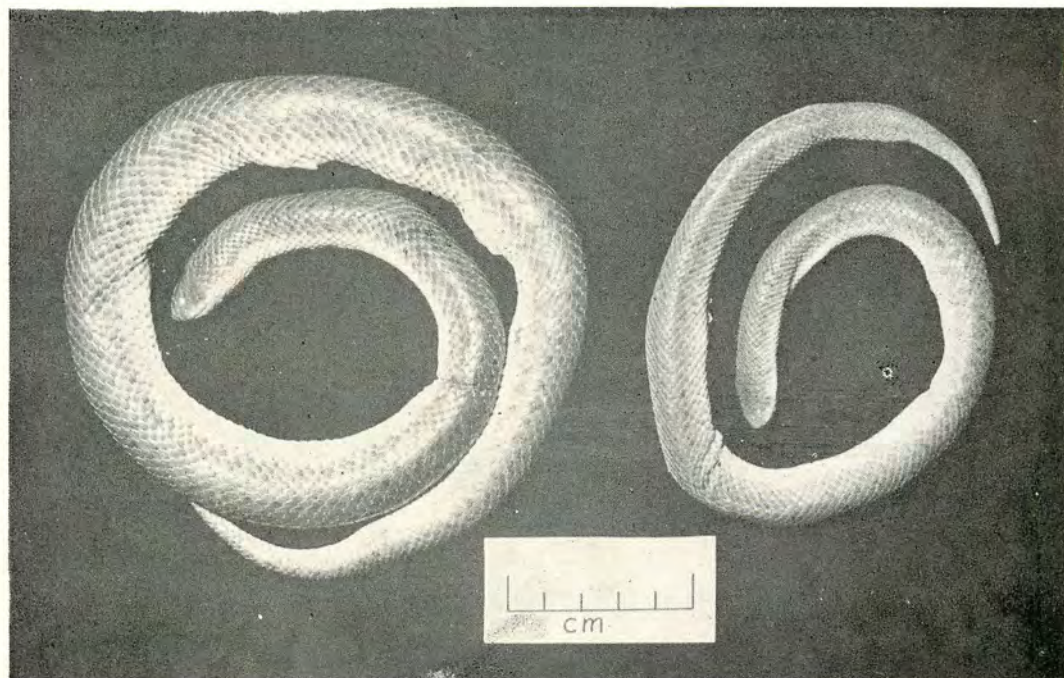
	Specimen number						Known range
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Total length	650	466	440	431	408	446	—
Tail length	69	52	54	55	43	60	—
Scale rows at Mid body	26	25	25	25	25	25	25-27
Ventral scales ²	145	146	142	146	147	144	138-156
Subcaudal ³ scales	32	30	32	33	31	36	28-43

Note 1. From TWEEDIE (1957).

2. All specimens with last ventral (next to anal) divided, Specimen 6 also has second to last ventral divided.

3. All specimens have paired subcaudals throughout except 2 which has the 2nd. and 6th. (from anus) complete.

The specimens vary considerably in live dorsal coloration. Specimens 1,2 and 5 are olive-brown; specimen 5 being more olive than the other two. Specimen 1, whilst being the largest, has conspicuous irregular small black spots (Plate III) which TWEEDIE (1957) describes as young coloration. Specimen 2 has a few black spots and specimen 5 has none (Plate I). Specimens 3 and 6 are purple-black with blackish-brown heads and with a suggestion of russet which is stronger towards the outer pale scale rows. Specimen 4 is a deep rich maroon-brown with irregular and inconspicuous black spots and a darker, almost blackish, head. In all specimens the dorsal coloration gradually fades to ivory white on the outer 4 or 5 scale rows and the ventrals, throat and chin are ivory white with the lower, and upper, lip slightly more yellowish. All specimens have the pale scales of the outer three rows clouded pale grey at the bases.



Specimen 1 (left) and 5 (right) of the Crab-eating Water Snake *Fordonia leucobalia* (Schleg.) from Saphan Hin, Phuket Island, western peninsular Thailand. Above, dorsal view; below, ventral view.

Of the specimens collected, and numbered in Table 1, 1 and 2 have been donated to the Centre for Thai National Reference Collection, ASRCT, Bangkok; 3 and 4 to the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago; and 5 and 6 have been given to Dr Boonsong Lekagul's private collection. The dorsal and ventral appearance of specimens 1 and 5 is illustrated in Plate 1.

Specimen 1 proved to contain six developed eggs, averaging in size 22.9 X 12.0 mm, the largest and smallest length being 28.9 and 14.8 mm respectively; and the largest and smallest width being 13.6 and 10.8 mm respectively.

As pointed out by Taylor in his review of the snakes of Thailand (1965), the Crab-eating Water Snake was to be expected to occur on the west coast of Thailand as it has been found in Burma and Malaya. The present record represents, however, the first report of the species in Thailand and thus adds it to the list of Thai fauna. The presence of this snake on Phuket Island raises the number of snake species known to exist on the island to 28 (FRITH, 1977, 1978; FRITH, & BOSWALL, 1978).

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