

Predation on *Ablepharus himalayanus* (Günther, 1864) by *Herpetoreas platyceps* (Blyth, 1855) in Himachal Pradesh, India

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The Himalayan Keelback (*Herpetoreas platyceps*) is a mildly venomous natricine snake inhabiting the Himalayan region of South Asia. In India, it occurs primarily along the Himalayan range from Jammu and Kashmir eastwards to Arunachal Pradesh (Smith, 1943; Uetz et al., 2026). The species inhabits a variety of habitats, including forests, agricultural fields, and areas near human settlements. It is known to feed on fish, amphibians, reptiles, reptile eggs, and small mammals (Whitaker and Captain, 2004).

Natural history observations on predator–prey interactions contribute valuable information on species ecology and trophic relationships (Paine, 1969). Several predation events involving reptiles have been documented from the Himalayan region, including predation of Hodgson’s Ratsnake (*Elaphe hodgsoni*) by the Caspian Cobra (*Naja oxiana*), of the Kashmir Rock Agama (*Laudakia tuberculata*) by the Many-banded Catsnake (*Boiga multifasciata*), and of a cicada (genus *Platylomia*) by *L. tuberculata* (Bhardwaj and Kapoor, 2022; Kapoor et al., 2023, 2024). Here, an observation of a predation event involving *H. platyceps* and a skink identified as *Ablepharus himalayanus* is reported from Himachal Pradesh, India.

During an opportunistic field observation on 8 June 2025 at 11:57 h, I encountered an adult *H. platyceps* in an oak-dominated forest near Sihunta, Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh, India (32.2936°N, 76.1072°E, elevation 1217 m). At the time of the encounter, the snake was holding a skink by the neck region and had several body coils wrapped around the prey (Fig. 1). The skink remained partially visible outside the coils.

Based on its overall body shape, smooth glossy scales, short limbs, colouration, and the known occurrence of the species in the region (Ouboter, 1986), I identified the prey as *Ablepharus himalayanus*. Even though I could not examine the lizard directly, the photograph allows recognition of the skink as a member of the genus *Ablepharus*. With the only congener, *A. ladacensis*, occurring at much higher elevations and never in oak forests, this is currently the only option for a member of the genus in Himachal Pradesh.

During the observation period, the snake maintained its coils around the prey and positioned it into a head-first orientation. I was unable to continue the observation until ingestion was completed, but the situation leaves little doubt about the ultimate outcome.

Whitaker and Captain (2004) reported skinks among the dietary items of *H. platyceps* but no specific skink taxon was identified. This report, with its photographic documentation, is a rare direct observation of predation by *H. platyceps* and its interaction with *A. himalayanus* in the western Himalaya. Continued documentation of such predator–prey interactions will improve our understanding of the natural history and feeding ecology of Himalayan reptiles.

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Figure 1. *Herpetoreas platyceps* constricting *Ablepharus himalayanus* at Sihunta, Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh, India. Photograph by Rakeshwar Kapoor.

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