

Territorial defense by the Taiwanese Kukrisnake

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The Taiwanese Kukrisnake. Image: robferblue/flickr

(PhysOrg.com) -- In a first documented case of territorial behavior by a species of snake, a team led by Wen-San Huang of Taiwan's National Museum of Natural Science and Cornell University discuss the Kukrisnakes from Taiwan's Orchid Island in a report published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

While territorial behavior is common in other reptiles, such as lizards, snakes normally rely on mobile food sources and rely on hunting. Once a meal is found, they move on. However, the Kukrisnakes of Orchid Island have found themselves a defendable source of food and they are standing their ground, especially the females.

Orchid Island is home to many turtle nesting grounds and those nests are

where the snakes have set up camp so to speak. These nests contain upwards of 100 eggs which take two months to hatch. This provides the snake with a food source that can last weeks without going bad.

Researchers discovered it is usually the male snakes which find the nests first; however, if a female snake should happen upon the same nest, it is usually the female who wins out.

Kukrisnakes have very large blade-like teeth and are very aggressive. They also fend off attackers by raising their tail in order to mimic another head. Unfortunately for the male snake, the tail area also contains their manhood. Male Kukrisnakes, having what is called a hemipenis, or twin penis, also evert these to further confuse predators. Unfortunately, when fighting a female with large teeth, it appears these male snakes would rather give up the nests than risk injury and loss of reproductive function, even though by size they are much larger than their female counterparts.

Huang found however, if another female happened upon a nest already occupied by another female snake, they seem to stick together and share the contents of the nest.

More information: Territorial behavior in Taiwanese kukrisnakes (*Oligodon formosanus*), *PNAS*, Published online before print April 18, 2011, [doi:10.1073/pnas.1101804108](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1101804108)

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