

## Ingestion of a Discarded Foam Ear Plug by a Wild Lesser Black Whip Snake (*Demansia vestigiata*; De Vis, 1884) in Central Province, Papua New Guinea

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The lesser black whip snake, *Demansia vestigiata* (De Vis, 1884) is a small (<1.2m) member of the elapid family, native to Australia (Western Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland) and South-Eastern Papua New Guinea (Central Province, Western Province and National Capital District). This fast-moving diurnal species of snake is common in lowland areas of dry open grassland, heath and woodland, and can frequently be encountered in and around human settlements. It typically feeds on lizards and frogs. Bites from the lesser black whip snake can result in localised pain and swelling, though serious envenomation is considered

unlikely (O'shea 1996). Here I report an unusual case of the ingestion of a discarded foam ear plug by *D.vestigiata* in Central Province, Papua New Guinea.

On 26<sup>th</sup> July 2018 at 15:40 h I was called out to collect an adult male lesser black whip snake (SVL 755 mm, TL 1022 mm, weight 76 g) that had been injured by a local grass cutter working along a road verge within the vicinity of Lea Lea, Central Province, Papua New Guinea. The surrounding habitats consisted of open grassland, isolated pandanus groves and saltmarsh, interspersed with several blocks of commercial warehouse buildings. The snake was retrieved from within a small patch of vegetation on a road verge where it had taken refuge after being struck by grass cutting machinery, and was situated approximately two metres from the road edge. Injury to the head of the snake was visible along with a large open laceration on its flank (Figure 1). Despite being alive at the time of capture, the individual died shortly after being brought back to our facility. A dissection of the deceased snake revealed that it had consumed a discarded foam ear plug measuring 32 mm (Figure 2). No evidence of prey was found amongst the stomach contents.



**Figure 1.** Adult male *Demasia vestigiata* showing injuries caused by grass cutting machinery

Although in this instance it can be determined that death was the result of extensive injuries sustained from grass cutting machinery, the ingestion of discarded waste products is known to cause mortality in snakes (Strine *et al.* 2014). Disposable foam ear plugs are frequently used for hearing protection by local contractors and workers, and various other forms of waste pollution is a common sight



**Figure 2.** The discarded foam ear plug retrieved from the stomach of the adult male *Demansia vestigiata*

around local habitats. The unusual case reported here highlights the importance of proper disposal of all waste products following use in order to prevent potential harm to wildlife, including snakes.

#### REFERENCES

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