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First record of algal fouling on Dog-faced Water Snake from Gorai, Mumbai, India

Biofouling is the unintended settlement and growth of aquatic species on submerged natural and artificial surfaces. Algal fouling, a type of biofouling, refers to the undesirable accumulation of algae and other microorganisms on surfaces including bodies of moving organism, particularly in aquatic environments. Among aquatic animals, fouling by algae has been reported in freshwater (Neil & Allen 1954) and marine turtles (Báez et al. 2002) and several taxa of sea snakes *Acrochordus granulatus*, *Aipysurus aephaeformis*, *A. duboisii*, *A. foliosquama*, *A. fuscus*, *A. laevis*, *Hydrophis coggeri*, *H. kingii*, *H. melanocephalus*, *H. peroni*, and *H. stokesii*.

Algal fouling has previously been reported in *Cerberus rynchops* from Sonadia Island, Bangladesh. During a 17-day survey, the authors captured 513 specimens, of which five exhibited dense algal fouling (Rahman & Reza 2013).

Although the algae fouling observed on *C. rynchops* in Gorai Creek, Mumbai, India was a chance sighting, and it has not been reported from India, *C. rynchops* belong to the family



Cerberus rynchops algae fouling-full body



Cerberus rynchops algae fouling-half body



Cerberus rynchops algae fouling on the body
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Homalopsidae. These are medium sized, rare fanged aquatic snakes, inhabiting various range of coastal low-lying habitats such as mangroves, mudflats, tidal rivers. *Cerberus* snakes are widely distributed in the coastal areas of southern and southeastern Asia to northern Australia. Among the five recognized species of *Cerberus*, *C. rynchops* is known to occur in the coastal areas of India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Myanmar (Murphy et al. 2012). There are reports of *C. rynchops* seen in Gorai mangroves, Mumbai, Maharashtra (Chauhan & Shingadia 2012).

On the morning of 11 February 2025, during a routine cycling visit to Gorai creek, Borivali (19.2369° N, 72.8201° E), I found a snake *Cerberus rynchops* covered in algae. At first, it looked like a rope but on a closer examination it was a snake covered in algae. The snake was captured by hand, photographed using mobile phone camera and released back into the sea where it was found. The snake looked visibly tired may be due to swimming in the sea and possibly because of the algae growth on its body.

Although no harmful effects are known on the snake *Cerberus rynchops* due to algae fouling, there are possible pros and cons for the same. Pros can be that the algae fouling helps the snake in blending with the surroundings, protecting it from predators and helps it camouflage itself from the prey. Cons can be included in creating greater resistance during movement. It was not determined whether the algae would be lost completely at ecdysis or if the attached algae would disrupt the normal

shedding cycle (Shine et al. 2010; Rahman & Reza 2013).

Algae fouling in *Cerberus rynchops* has not been studied in detail, and hence, a detailed study needs to be carried out. This represents the first document record of algae fouling from India.

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