

Red Headed Krait – Bungarus flaviceps – Deadly



Deadly and Beautiful, the red-headed krait is one of the rare and very venomous elapids living in Thailand's rainforests. ©2011 ThailandSnakes.com.

(Last updated: 20 February 2017)

Red Headed Krait (*Bungarus flaviceps*)

Thais say: *Ngoo sam lee-um hoo-uh si dang*

Length: These kraits grow to about 2 meters long, though most adults found are shorter.

Appearance: Somewhat pronounced vertebral ridge, which differentiates from the Malayan Blue Coral Snake (*Calliophis bivirgata*). Body is black or dark grey, the head and tail are bright red or orange. The tail on the venter is also the same color. The rest of the venter is creme to white colored. The head is more distinct from the neck than *C. bivirgata*. Dorsal scale count: 13-13-13.

Range: In Thailand the Red-headed Krait is only found in the southern Thailand provinces from Ratchaburi and southward. Across the globe they are most heavily concentrated in Malaysia, Borneo, and a couple other places. Recently I found a large 1.9 meter specimen in rainforest in the Trang province. I have also found them in Surat Thani, and Krabi provinces.

Habitat: Lowlands and hilly rainforest type habitat. The last

four of these snakes I saw were all found at less than 200 meters elevation.

Active Time? Probably active both at night and day. Three of four of these snakes in our local area were found during the daylight.

Food: Some say the red headed kraits eat more frogs, lizards, eggs, and rodents than other snakes. Probably they are opportunistic and eat whatever presents itself.

Defensive Behavior: Of the four snakes examined – none struck out, none attempted to bite at all. Note – all but one was handled during daylight hours.

Venom Toxicity: Venomous, and deadly. The venom has been shown to have an LD50 subcutaneous measurement of .35 mg/kg for *Bungarus flaviceps*, while *Bungarus candidus* (Malayan Krait) was .32 mg/kg, and *Bungarus fasciatus* (Banded Krait), .62 mg/kg and less than that in another study. This makes it one of the top venomous snakes on the planet and within the top three most venomous in Thailand. The black mamba is listed at the same .32 mg/kg by venom researcher, Dr. Bryan Grieg Fry at his site. (well, now he pulled down his chart). Only 10 other terrestrial snakes in the world were listed with more potent venom. Little is known of the this venom's effect on humans after a bite, though it is likely very similar to a bite from *Bungarus candidus*, I could find no treatment studies due to bites being quite rare by this krait species.

From the abstract of a recent (2/2010) venom study in Malaysia: *Bungarus flaviceps* (red-headed krait) venom presents an intravenous LD50 of 0.32 µg/g and exhibits enzymatic activities similar to other *Bungarus* toxins. ELISA cross-reactions between anti-*Bungarus flaviceps* and a variety of elapid and viperid venoms were observed in the current study. Double-sandwich ELISA was highly specific, since anti- *B. flaviceps* serum did not cross-react with any tested venom,

indicating that this assay can be used for species diagnosis in *B. flaviceps* bites. In the indirect ELISA, anti- *B. flaviceps* serum cross-reacted moderately with three different *Bungarus* venoms (9-18%) and *Notechis scutatus* venom, but minimally with other elapid and viperid toxins. The results indicated that *B. flaviceps* venom shares common epitopes with other *Bungarus* species as well as with *N. scutatus*. The lethality of the *B. flaviceps* venom was neutralized effectively by antiserum prepared against *B. candidus* and *B. flaviceps* toxins and a commercial bivalent elapid antivenom prepared against *B. multicinctus* and *Naja naja atra* venoms, but was not neutralized by commercial antivenoms prepared against Thai cobra, king cobra and banded krait. These data also suggested that the major lethal toxins of *B. flaviceps* venom are similar to those found in *B. multicinctus* and *B. candidus* venoms.

Treatment Summary: Envenomation can produce moderate to severe flaccid paralysis, and respiratory failure requiring intubation and ventilation in severe cases. Antivenom available for major species (detailed below), could potentially prevent worsening of paralysis, but may not reverse established paralysis.

Key Diagnostic Features: Minimal to mild local reaction + flaccid paralysis

Antivenom Code: SAsTRC04

Antivenom Name: Banded Krait Antivenin

Manufacturer: Science Division, Thai Red Cross Society

Phone: +66-2-252-0161 (up to 0164)

Address: Queen Saovabha Memorial Institute, 1871 Rama IV Road, Pathumwan, Bangkok 10330

Country: Thailand

Offspring: Two clutches from two adult female red-headed kraits were studied by Chulalongkorn University scientists in Bangkok. One clutch was four eggs, and the other, six eggs.

After 81-84 days in incubation at 26-27C and the other clutch at 30-32C eggs hatched. Less eggs hatched at the higher temperature incubation. Average hatchling length was 28.9cm +/- .8cm measured from snout to vent. Weight of each was 7.2 to 7.8 grams. Humidity in the incubation enclosures was 60-70%. After 7-10 days all snakes had shed.

Notes: I have seen four of these kraits, and they are quite incredible to find in the wild considering how rare they are. *Bungarus flaviceps* has not been studied very well, and I suspect that most of the information on Wikipedia and other information sources has been generalized from other Thailand kraits like the Blue Krait (*Bungarus candidus*) and Many Banded Krait (*Bungarus multicinctus*) because the wording seems too similar to be by chance. There are a number of Malayan Blue Coral snakes mis-identified on Youtube videos, and on Wikipedia.

These snakes have not been studied well in captivity or in the wild, except for the previously mentioned study in which the kraits lived surprisingly long. Usually the literature shows the red-headed krait dies quickly in captivity. These kraits are not known to bite during daytime, but, be exceptionally careful when handling them.

Substrate: Best? Leaves and something large to hide under – wood is best, rocks, something solid.

Ways to differentiate *Bungarus flaviceps* from the Malayan Blue Coral Snake (*Calliophis bivirgatus*):

1. *B. flaviceps* has a triangle cross-section, while *C. bivirgatus* has more of a round cross-section.
2. *C. bivirgatus* has a venter that is all red – orange. *B.*

flaviceps has red under the head and tail only.

3. *B. flaviceps* reaches about 2 meters while *B. bivirgatus* grows to just 1.7 meters.

4. *B. bivirgatus* has lateral lines on both sides of the body toward the venter, which are solid light blue or white.

5. By studying some video one can see how their crawling pattern differs.

6. *B. flaviceps* has a more sizable head, a wider head, and larger mouth than the coral snake.

7/25/13 Update. At 11:30 pm in a Thailand National Park in Trang Province, a friend and I found a large 1.9+ meter long *Bungarus flaviceps* on the trail and photographed and shot video of it. Video #1 is of this snake. The photos on this page are all of the same snake. As with all snakes found, it was released in the same spot as where it was found.

Red-headed Krait Scientific Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Subphylum: Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Serpentes

Family: Elapidae

Genus: *Bungarus*

Species: *Bungarus flaviceps*

Binomial name: *Bungarus flaviceps*

Classified by Reinhardt, in year, 1843

Photos of *Bungarus flaviceps*



Tailing the red-headed krait around 2 a.m. in the middle of the rainforest, Trang Province, Thailand.



After a krait stops trying to get away, you will be lucky to get a little peak before it covers its head. ©2011 ThailandSnakes.com.



The tail is unmistakably krait. The high-vertebral ridge is one of the differentiators between this snake and the similar in color, Blue Malayan Coral Snake. ©2011 ThailandSnakes.com.

Video – Large Red-Headed Krait caught in Trang Province, Southern Thailand:

Video – Red Headed Krait – *Bungarus flaviceps* caught in Southern Thailand:

Part 2 of Red Headed Krait Video:

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Malayan Krait – Blue Krait – Venomous – Deadly



Malayan Krait – or, Blue Krait – Venomous –
Deadly

[Last Updated: 15 May 2017]

[Malayan Krait Fact Page](#) >

Malayan Krait (Blue Krait) – Venomous and Deadly

One of the top 10 most toxic terrestrial venomous snakes in the world resides in Thailand, and it is second behind the *Bungarus multicinctus* in strength of venom, according to LD50 charts for subcutaneous venom injection (in mice), is the Malayan Krait, also called the Blue Krait (*Bungarus candidus*).

I've been looking for one of these snakes in the wild for a couple of years. I don't herp at night all that much so it was really unlikely that I saw one for a bit of time – but I was due to see this one.

Update 2015 – I've seen around one dozen of these snakes. They seem to be active most from 9 p.m. to 11 p.m. cruising the ground along sidewalks or rocks. They are not big biters, and I've only seen one bite the tongs as I picked it up. These are relatively common snakes in Krabi province.

Here's the story I put on Youtube about how it came to be that I caught this beautiful krait..

This is the ultimate krait for me in Thailand, for me. I've caught monocled cobras and maybe 60 other kinds of snake. Last night I hit the jackpot by catching the lovely Malayan Krait – the black / white banded snake you see in the video.

I was herping with a guy from the UK, Michael. He found a red-necked keelback about 30 minutes before. We were herping HARD all over this great wildlife area and I was fully prepared to find nothing more. It was hard herping.

I stopped on the sidewalk for a second and was shining my flashlight (9pm) on the greenery just below the sidewalk (and next to it).

I couldn't mistake the black/white pattern as the blue krait moved just inches from Michael's feet.

I said loudly – KRAIT KRAIT! Move back, move over here!

My first instinct, before I opened my mouth was to grab that sucker with the tongs and bag him.

As I moved to do that I realized Michael might get a good bite!

It was funny to see in hindsight how my mind worked. I'm glad I thought of him – right? You know how you get so excited you just act? That's jsut about where I was. I'd looked for years and years for one of these kraits. Finally there it was – 1 foot from me, and I had all the equipment I needed to catch it

if I was fast enough...

Anyway – after he moved a safe bit away I gave the initial squeeze with the tongs and pulled it up where we could see it. It was a beauty. I held it for a while as Michael searched through my backback for the snake bag. The krait got loose because I didn't want to squeeze too hard... I found the bag – and re-found the krait who was already half under a large rock that I couldn't have moved if I wanted to.

I slowly pulled it out with the tongs and we bagged it.

Today we took this video in the morning.

She was calm... slow for a bit, then woke RIGHT up. You don't want to miss this video if you handle or plan on handling kraits. They do have the potential to move VERY fast in whatever direction they choose. I was shocked (horrified!) that it came right at me in an instant.

I never felt as alive as in those few seconds, I can tell you truthfully.

Though we tailed it – and were able to handle the krait a little bit – I never felt comfortable with it – and would never hold one, day or night. Least of all night-time.

So – that's the story.

More info on [Bungarus candidus here](#).

Come to Thailand and herp – and see what we can find!

The video is below. You don't want to miss the video because just after I say something like, "This snake kills a few people a year in Thailand" the krait comes at me totally unexpectedly and I freak out trying to move my feet out of the way and get back. Just by pure luck I filmed it coming at me.

That was one of the scariest moments of my life – and yet my

body still reacted to get out of the way. It was totally unexpected – and yet I was able to move fast enough. I don't know whether it would have bitten me, but I don't see why not. We had aggravated it for a good 20 minutes and it was probably getting angrier as time went on.

If you work with kraits – don't be lulled into the false sense of control that you don't have. The krait can, at any time, turn one of your best days into the worst day of your life. There are rumors that if this krait or the many-banded krait (*Bungarus multicinctus*) bit you, and you went to the hospital – 50% chance you will STILL die from the venom. Not sure if that's true – but, still – there are plenty of experts saying that, and it's damn strong, and nothing to mess with.

Please don't hand-hold the kraits – ever.

Check out my youtube video pages at

[Thailand Snakes](http://www.youtube.com/user/thailandsnakes) – <http://www.youtube.com/user/thailandsnakes>

and

[Thailand Living](http://www.youtube.com/Thailand-Living) – <http://www.youtube.com/Thailand-Living>

More info on [Bungarus candidus here](#).

Cheers!

My “Thailand Snakes” Video Channel on the Malayan Krait at Youtube:

Juvenile Blue (Malayan) Krait:

An Adult Malayan Krait at Night in Southern Thailand: