

LATICAUDA SAINTGIRONSI (Sea Krait). PREDATION. Field observations and laboratory experiments indicate that sea snakes quickly and efficiently kill their prey (fishes) by injecting potent venom (Ineich and Laboute 2002. Sea snakes of New Caledonia. IRD et Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle Editions, Collection Faune et flore tropicales, Paris. 302 pp). Rapid death is probably essential to foraging success in sea snakes. If death were delayed (as is the case in most species of terrestrial venomous snakes) the fish might escape and be difficult to locate in the marine environment. Here, we present the first record of any species of sea snake regurgitating a living prey item (Moray Eel, *Gymnothorax undulatus*).

In the course of conducting mark-recapture studies of large populations of *Laticauda saintgironsi* and *Laticauda laticaudata* on Signal Islet, New Caledonia (22.29 S; 166.29 E) we captured an adult male (695 mm SVL) *L. saintgironsi* on 8 December 2005 at 1740 h. While it was coming back from the sea. Immediately after capture, it regurgitated a Moray Eel. Spontaneous regurgitation is uncommon in sea kraits. We have captured over 3,300 sea kraits with prey items in their stomachs and have observed less than 10 spontaneous regurgitations. Upon regurgitation, the eel dropped into shallow (5 cm) and was not easy to catch. We rapidly placed the eel in a container filled with sea-water (which we replaced every 15 min.). Initially, the eel moved slowly but was still able to swim. Multiple bite-marks visible on the body and the eel's behaviour suggest it had been envenomated. The eel became increasingly lethargic over time. After 78 min. it lay on its back, but righted itself after tactile stimulation with a finger. After 95 min. gill (respiratory) movements became almost undetectable. It died 110 min after the regurgitation, very likely due to the effect of the venom. Overall, the eel survived approximately two hours after being bitten, swallowed, and then regurgitated. The eel was deposited in a collection of sea krait prey (# 630) at the Centre d'Etudes Biologiques de Chizé (CEBC-CNRS UPR 1934). Our observations indicate that while the venom of *L. saintgironsi* certainly causes a paralysis (perhaps transitory or partial) it does not necessarily kill prey instantaneously. Such observations also reveal that sea kraits can forage in the close vicinity of their home islands.

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