

Notes on Humans as Prey of Reticulated Pythons *Malayopython reticulatus* (Serpentes: Pythonidae) in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines documented cases of humans being preyed upon or attempted to be preyed upon by Reticulated Pythons *Malayopython reticulatus* in Indonesia, spanning nearly a century from 1927 to 2025. Our study reveals 17 incidents, with snakes involved measuring between 5-8 meters in length. The victims' ages ranged from 13 to 90 years old, with 13 fatalities reported. Both males and females were affected, with 8 incidents involving men and 8 involving women. Sulawesi emerges as a hotspot for such encounters, accounting for a significant proportion of reported cases. This study highlights the importance of understanding human-python encounters and promoting a more harmonious coexistence between humans and wildlife in Indonesia.

Keywords: human-wildlife coexistence, Indonesia, large snake, *Malayopython reticulatus*, Reticulated Python.

Introduction

Indonesia is renowned for its rich biodiversity, with a vast array of flora and fauna that are found nowhere else on Earth (IBSAP 2025). The country's unique geography, comprising over 17,000 islands, has given rise to a multitude of ecosystems that support an incredible variety of plant and animal life (Yustian *et al.* 2017; Setiawan *et al.* 2019). Among the many fascinating groups of organisms found in Indonesia, the herpetofauna stands out for its remarkable diversity and complexity (Prasetyo & Iqbal 2022; Tanjung *et al.* 2023).

As one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, Indonesia is home to an astonishing number of reptile and amphibian species, many of which are endemic to the region (Iqbal *et al.* 2021; Baderan *et al.* 2023). The herpetofauna of Indonesia includes a wide range of species, from the iconic Komodo dragon to the colorful and diverse array of frogs, lizards and snakes that inhabit the country's forests, grasslands, and wetlands (Jessop *et al.* 2021; Iqbal *et al.* 2023a). The reptile fauna of Indonesia is particularly notable for its impressive array of snake species, including the majestic Reticulated Python *Malayopython reticulatus* (Stuart *et al.* 2018).

As one of the largest snakes in the world, the *M. reticulatus* plays a vital role in maintaining the balance of ecosystems in Indonesia, and its presence is an important indicator of the health and integrity of these ecosystems (Auliya *et al.* 2002). However, the increasing encroachment of human activities into natural habitats has led to a rise in conflicts between humans and wildlife, including snakes (Fredriksson 2005). In Indonesia, encounters between humans and *M. reticulatus* can have serious consequences, and there is a need for greater understanding and awareness of the dynamics of these interactions (Shine *et al.* 1999). Due to limited research on human-python conflicts in Indonesia, here, we report documented records of humans being preyed upon or attempted to be preyed upon by *M. reticulatus* in Indonesia.

Methods

Data Collection

We searched various sources, including scientific journals, news articles, and reports from various sources, to gather information on documented cases of *M. reticulatus* attacks on humans in Indonesia. Our team includes researchers with experience in conducting literature reviews and synthesizing information from diverse sources to investigate specific topics in wildlife (Iqbal *et al.* 2023b; 2024). The search was conducted using keywords such as "Reticulated Python attacks on humans in Indonesia", "human-python conflicts in Indonesia" and "*Malayopython reticulatus* attacks on humans".

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed to identify patterns and trends in human-python conflicts in Indonesia. We recorded the location, date, and outcome of each incident, as well as the size of the snake involved (when available). The data were then compiled into a table (Table 1) and mapped (Figure 1) to visualize the distribution of incidents across Indonesia.

Inclusion Criteria

To be included in the study, incidents had to meet the following criteria:

1. The incident involved a *M. reticulatus*.
2. The incident occurred in Indonesia.
3. The incident involved a human being preyed upon or attempted to be preyed upon by the snake.

This study has some limitations, including the reliance on reported cases and the potential for underreporting of incidents. Additionally, the quality and detail of the data varied depending on the source.

Results and Discussion

The available information of humans being preyed upon or attempted to be preyed upon by *M. reticulatus* in Indonesia is presented in Table 1 and Fig. 1.

Table 1. Documented records of humans being preyed upon or attempted to be preyed upon by Reticulated Pythons *Malayopython reticulatus* in Indonesia. Number on the table refer to the map (Figure 1).

Location	Date	Number on the Map	Sources	Remarks
Salibabu Island, North Sulawesi	c. 1927	1	Kopstein 1927; Murphy & Henderson 1997	A 14-year old boy was eaten by a snake
Panjang, Lampung	6 Dec 1929	2	Murphy & Henderson 1997	A local people was attacked and killed by a snake
Kisaran, North Sumatra	May 1938	3	Murphy & Henderson 1997	A foreman was attacked, but he was freed and alive
Medan, North Sumatra	18 Mar 2010	4	Marza 2010	A 13-year old boy was attacked and killed
Mukomuko, Bengkulu	29 Dec 2011	5	Gultom 2011	A 40-year old man was attacked, but he was freed and alive
Mamuju, West Sulawesi	27 Mar 2017	6	BBC 2017; Strait Times 2017	A 25-year old man was found inside the stomach of a snake (7 m)
Bone, South Sulawesi	3 Apr 2017	7	Abdurrahman 2017	A 50-year old man was attacked, but he was freed and alive
Muna Island, Southeast Sulawesi	14 Jun 2018	8	Damanik 2018; Los Angeles Times 2018	A 54-year old woman was killed and eaten by a snake (7 m)
Bombana, Southeast Sulawesi	14 Jun 2020	9	Budi 2020	A 16-year old boy was attacked and killed by a snake (7 m)

Tanjung Jabung, Jambi	23 Oct 2020	10	Suwandi & Susanti 2020	A 52-year old woman was killed and swallowed by a snake (6 m)
Tanjung Jabung, Jambi	8 Feb 2022	11	Mairiadi 2022	A 90-year old woman was attacked and killed by a snake
Sidenreng Rappang, South Sulawesi	7 Jun 2024	12	Strait Times 2024a	A 45-year old woman discovered inside a snake (5 m)
Luwu, South Sulawesi	3 Jul 2024	13	Aulia & Batara 2024; Strait Times 2024b	A 30-year old woman was found dead inside the belly of a snake (8 m)
Muaro Jambi, Jambi	27 Aug 2024	14	Asia Pacific Press 2024	A 57-year old woman was found dead inside the belly of a snake
Luwu Utara, South Sulawesi	26 Nov 2024	15	Mirror 2024; Qadri 2024	A 30-year old man was killed and swallowed by a snake (7 m)
Sidenreng Rappang, South Sulawesi	1 Apr 2025	16	Abduh 2025	A 66-year old woman was killed and swallowed by a snake (7 m)
Buton Island, Southeast Sulawesi	9 Apr 2025	17	Lazuardi 2025	A 55-year old woman was killed and nearly swallowed by a snake (6,5 m)

The documented records of humans being preyed upon or attempted to be preyed upon by *M. reticulatus* in Indonesia highlight the complexity of human-wildlife conflicts in the country. Our findings show that *M. reticulatus* attacks on humans are distributed across multiple regions in Indonesia, with Sulawesi emerging as a notable hotspot, accounting for 10 from 17 reported cases (Fig. 1). However, it is notable that many of the incidents occurred in rural or near plantation areas, where human settlements overlap with the snake's habitat. According to Headland & Greene (2011), a study on hunter-gatherers in the Philippines found that approximately 26% of men in one community had experienced attacks or fatalities from *M. reticulatus*. In Malaysia, it is reported that a 29-year-old rubber tapper was swallowed by a large python in Malaysia on 6 September 1995, marking the first verified case of a *M. reticulatus* attempting to ingest an adult human in modern Malaysian history (Stewart 1995).

The documented cases of *M. reticulatus* attacks on humans in Indonesia from 1927 to 2025 reveal a concerning trend. The victims' ages ranged from 13 to 90 years old, with 13 fatalities reported, highlighting the vulnerability of humans across various age groups to python attacks. Notably, both males (8 incidents) and females (8 incidents, with 1 gender not clearly specified in relation to total incidents but based on data provided it seems to balance out) were affected, suggesting that python attacks do not discriminate by gender. In 1638, the Governor-General of the Dutch East India Company reported a massive 7-meter-long snake that strangled and swallowed an enslaved woman in the Banda Islands, an incident supported by similar, though less reliable, reports in early travel journals (Nationaal Archief 1811; Blussé & de Moor 2016).

The size of the snakes involved in the attacks varied, but most were reported to be around 5-8 m in length. This suggests that larger snakes may be more likely to view humans as potential prey, although more research is needed to confirm this. The outcomes of the incidents varied, with some individuals being killed and eaten, while others survived with injuries or were rescued. The fact that some individuals survived attacks suggests that humans may be able to defend themselves or escape from *M. reticulatus* attacks under certain circumstances. Reticulated pythons are remarkably difficult to detect due to their exceptional camouflage, daytime inactivity, and silent nature, despite their massive size. As these snakes grow, their prey preferences shift: smaller pythons (less than 3-4 m in length) primarily feed on rodents like rats, while larger individuals (over 3-4 m) target larger mammals, depending on prey availability (Shine *et al.* 1998, 1999; Auliya 2003).

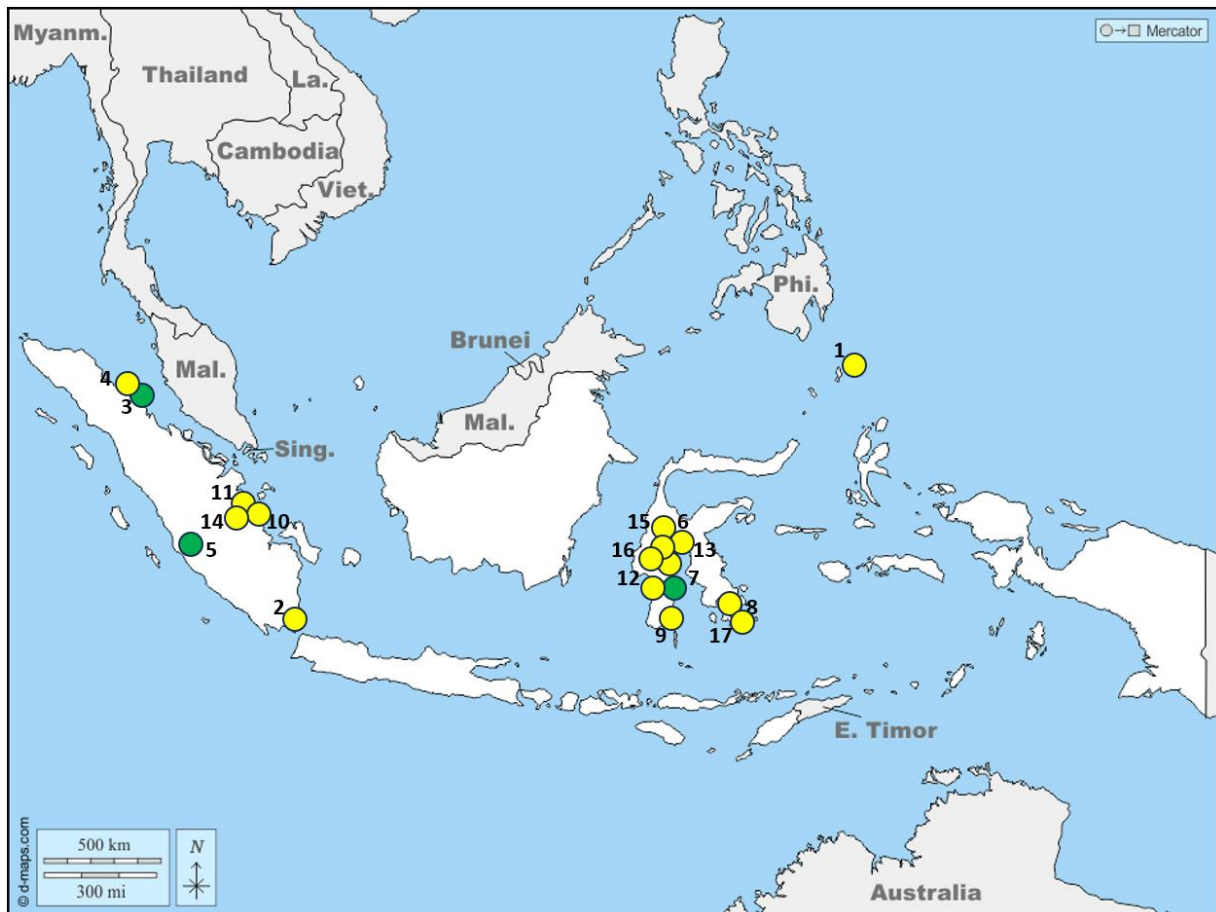


Figure 1. The map illustrates distribution of incidents in Indonesia where Reticulated Pythons *Malayopython reticulatus* preyed upon, or attempted to prey upon humans. Yellow circles indicate successful predation, while green circles represent attempted attacks. Numbers on the map correspond to those listed in Table 1.



Figure 2. A massive Reticulated Python *Malayopython reticulatus*, approximately 6 meters long, was discovered on 20 August 2016 in an urban area of South Sumatra Province, Indonesia (Photo credit: Muhammad Iqbal).

Sulawesi is dominating the reports of *M. reticulatus* attacks on humans in Indonesia, following Sumatra, with multiple incidents reported in earlier and recent years. In contrast, there are no records from two major islands in Indonesia, Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo) and Java, although this species found in both islands (Stuart *et al.* 2018, Fig. 2). The Sulawesi island is emergence as a hotspot for such encounters warrants further investigation into geographical, environmental, and anthropogenic factors contributing to these incidents. According to the available references, *M. reticulatus* can reach remarkable sizes, with the longest recorded individual measuring 10.05 meters, found on Sulawesi Island, Indonesia (Raven 1946; Murphy & Henderson 1997). Some notable incidents in Sulawesi include: multiple fatalities (in 2024, there are three people killed and swallowed by *M. reticulatus*), and recent attacks (in 2025, there are two people killed and swallowed by this species). We assume that several factors may contribute to this trend, including geographical factors, human settlement patterns, agricultural activities and snake behavior.

Our findings have significant implications for both conservation efforts and human safety. Online resources provide a valuable means of gathering data on obstacles to snake conservation, especially in resource-limited areas (Babalola *et al.* 2020). Education and outreach programs can be implemented to raise awareness about *M. reticulatus* behavior and prevention strategies, mitigating encounters. However, studying snake biology, distribution, and snakebite epidemiology is challenging due to their elusive behavior and complex life history (Durso *et al.* 2021). Developing and disseminating snakebite prevention and response protocols to local communities is crucial. This study underscores the need for further research on human-python conflicts in Indonesia and effective management strategies. By understanding human-python interactions, we can reduce risks and promote coexistence between humans and wildlife.

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