

1 No room to roam: King Cobras reduce 2 movement in agriculture

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13 **Abstract**

14 Studying animal movement provides insights into how animals react to land-use changes, specifically
15 how animals can change their behaviour in agricultural areas. Recent reviews show a tendency for
16 species to reduce movements in response to increased human landscape modification, but the study of
17 movement has not been extensively explored in reptiles. We examined movements of a large reptilian
18 predator, the King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*), in Northeast Thailand. We used a consistent regime
19 of radio-telemetry tracking to document movements across protected forest and adjacent agricultural
20 areas. We then adapted GPS-targeting analytic methods to examine the movement using metrics of site
21 reuse and dynamic Brownian Bridge Movement Model derived motion variance. Examination of
22 motion variance demonstrated that King Cobra movements increased in forested areas and tended to
23 decrease in agricultural areas. Our Integrated Step-Selection Functions indicated that when moving in
24 agricultural areas King Cobras restricted their movements, thereby remaining within vegetated semi-
25 natural areas, often located along the banks of irrigation canals. Site reuse metrics of residency time and
26 number of revisits remained unaffected by distance to landscape features. Neither motion variance nor
27 reuse metrics were consistently affected by the presence of threatening landscape features (e.g. roads,
28 human settlements); suggesting that King Cobras will remain in close proximity to threats, provided
29 habitat patches are available. Although King Cobras displayed heterogeneity in their response to
30 agricultural landscapes, the overall trend suggested a reduction in movements when faced with
31 fragmented habitat patches embedded in an otherwise inhospitable land-use matrix. Reductions in
32 movements are consistent with findings for mammals and forest specialist species.

33 **Keywords**

34 snake, reptile, *Ophiophagus hannah*, elapid, space-use, step-selection, dBBMM, site fidelity, tropical

35 Introduction

36 Examining animal movement can provide important information on conspecific interactions (Jellen et
37 al. 2007), predator-prey dynamics (Courbin et al. 2016, Vogt et al. 2018), reproductive behaviours
38 (Kamath and Losos 2018), and responses to anthropogenic threats (Valeix et al. 2012, Loveridge et al.
39 2017). Additionally, and perhaps most important to conservation planning, is the connection between
40 movement and resource acquisition (Prange et al. 2004, Mueller et al. 2011, Doherty et al. 2019).
41 Understanding habitat requirements, via animal movement, can help prioritise areas to protect from
42 land-use conversion, inform management, and build conservation plans (Fraser et al. 2018).

43 Anthropogenic land-use can alter the ecology of a landscape, changing resources (Arrondo et al. 2018),
44 modifying behaviour (Gaynor et al. 2018), and introducing novel threats (Robertson et al. 2013). Such
45 changes can result in increased mortality of species, or even subtler sub-lethal costs (Cottontail et al.
46 2009, Clark et al. 2011, Karraker et al. 2018). A global review of non-volant mammals revealed that
47 movements are directly impacted by human landscapes: animals present in human landscapes reduce
48 movement (Tucker et al. 2018).

49 Despite indications of overall reductions in vagility, the impacts of anthropogenic landscapes on
50 threatened species is likely to vary. Evolutionary history and key traits are likely to modify a species'
51 movements in relation to human-dominated landscapes (Fahrig 2007). For example, species that
52 evolved in continuous habitat (i.e. forest specialists) historically experienced lower costs to large
53 movements and crossing habitat barriers, potentially resulting in species leaving prime habitat and using
54 riskier anthropogenic landscapes (Fahrig 2007).

55 Vulnerability in anthropogenic landscapes can be augmented by species traits such as large body size,
56 parental investment in offspring, habitat specialisation, and low population densities, which have been
57 connected to increased extinction risk (Purvis et al. 2000, Cardillo 2005, Böhm et al. 2016, Slavenko et
58 al. 2016, Todd et al. 2017). Species frequently involved in human-wildlife conflict are also more
59 vulnerable to direct mortality in anthropogenic landscapes (Shankar et al. 2013, Marshall et al. 2018).

60 We aimed to explore the movement patterns of a large-bodied, highly persecuted predator in a mixed-
61 use landscape. Reptiles' role in ecosystems are underappreciated (Miranda 2017) and, in South East
62 Asian agricultural systems, likely constitute an important aspect of the remaining wildlife. Few reptile
63 species fulfil similar ecological functions comparable to large mammals, but King Cobras
64 (*Ophiophagus hannah* [CANTOR, 1836]) share several traits that could indicate their importance in
65 ecosystem functioning and vulnerability to habitat modification. Using radio-telemetry, we 1) assess
66 non-random habitat selection and 2) identify changes in movement patterns within anthropogenic areas
67 to reveal how King Cobras are potentially adapting to land-use change.

68 **Methods and Materials**

69 **Field Methods**

70 We studied King Cobras at the Sakaerat Biosphere Reserve located in Nakhon Ratchasima province,
71 Northeast Thailand (14.44–14.55°N, 101.88–101.95°E). The reserve is comprised of three zones
72 varying in levels of human-modification: the core zone, protected and fully forested; the buffer zone,
73 protected and undergoing reforestation; and the transitional zone, an agricultural matrix dominated by
74 rice, corn and sugar. The transitional zone also contains 159 villages and a four-lane highway that
75 connects Nakhon Ratchasima to Bangkok. Further descriptions of the study site can be found in Silva
76 et al. (2018) and Marshall et al. (2018, 2019).

77 The capture and implantation methods, alongside King Cobra measurements, have been previously
78 described in Marshall et al. (2018, 2019). We tracked individuals four times a day, with approximately
79 four hours between tracks from 2014-03-22 to 2018-07-28 (06:30, 11:00, 16:00, 20:00; the distribution
80 of time lags between tracking is available in Supplementary Figure 1). Full details of the tracking
81 protocols can be found in Silva et al. (2018). We named every individual according to their age class,
82 sex and capture number (e.g. AM006 = an adult male who was the sixth King Cobra captured).

83 **Environmental data**

84 We obtained daily rainfall and temperatures from five weather stations within the Sakaerat Biosphere
85 Reserve core zone to identify seasons (Sakaerat Environmental Research Station 2018). We averaged
86 daily readings by station, and ran cluster analysis to generate seasons using the *segclust2D* package
87 (v.0.2.0 Patin et al. 2018).

88 For the entire study site, we obtained high quality land-use shapefiles from a land survey by the Thai
89 Land Development Department (Land Development Department, Thailand 2017). We converted
90 categorical land-use classifications to continuous raster layers, describing Euclidean distances to key
91 landscape features (i.e., forest, roads, semi-natural areas, settlements, and water bodies). We set the cell
92 size of the newly created rasters to approximately 10m, which was sufficiently small to detect fine-scale
93 changes. Semi-natural areas were areas of scrub and vegetation not actively being farmed, often along
94 field margins, irrigation canals and in disused plots.

95 **Motion variance and area estimation**

96 Traditionally, research on reptile spatial ecology has relied on kernel density and minimum convex
97 polygon approaches to estimate space-use, as a proxy for movements and activity. Kernel density
98 estimators are problematic, because the technique assumes independence between locations, which can
99 never be strictly met in radio tracking datasets (Fieberg 2007). Efforts to combat autocorrelation

100 (Worton 1989), lead to a loss of information decreasing the biological relevance of space-use estimates
101 (De Solla et al. 1999). Dynamic Brownian Bridge Movement Models (dBBMM; Kranstauber et al.
102 2012) present an alternative that accounts for non-independence of locations and provides a balance
103 between over- and under-estimating space-use (Silva et al. 2018, 2020b).

104 We used the *move* package (v.3.1.0 Kranstauber et al. 2016) to run dBBMMs estimating motion
105 variance and the area used by King Cobras. We used the *adehabitatHR* package to extract utilisation
106 distributions and contours (v.0.4.16 Calenge 2006), and the *rgeos* (v.0.4.2 Bivand and Rundel 2018)
107 package to estimate the area of contours. We used dBBMMs instead of standard BBMMs, because the
108 former allowed for estimates of changes in motion variance over time (Horne et al. 2007, Kranstauber
109 et al. 2012). Following Kranstauber et al. (2012), we selected a window and margin size for dBBMMs
110 based on a timeframe that was biologically relevant to suspected changes in behavioural states. Due to
111 our reliance on Very High Frequency (VHF) radio tracking and associated coarse temporal resolution
112 data, we targeted the identification of activity and sheltering. We were able to detect shifts from activity
113 to sheltering with slightly greater than one day of radio tracking effort; therefore, we set margin size at
114 5 data points. A relevant time for a behavioural state to last was approximately one week (i.e. long-term
115 sheltering); therefore, we set window size to 25 data points. We used GPS error for dBBMM location
116 error on a point-by-point basis, for points that did not have GPS error recorded we used the mean GPS
117 error for that individual.

118 We explored seasonal changes in motion variance and how it was impacted by an individual's proximity
119 to landscape features (i.e., forest, roads, semi-natural areas, settlements, and water bodies). Due to serial
120 autocorrelation and over dispersal in motion variance and distance raster values, we used non-metric
121 multidimensional scaling (NMDS) to explore interactions among these variables. Using the *vegan*
122 package (v.2.5.5 Oksanen et al. 2019), we ran NMDS on a distance matrix created from the rasters that
123 described distances from key landscape features (using 2000 iterations to produce two axes). We plotted
124 the resulting two-dimensions and coloured points corresponding to the motion variance values. The
125 resulting visualisation allowed us to identify areas of high or low motion variance and the manner in
126 which they are associated with snakes' distances to landscape features.

127 **Site fidelity and reuse**

128 Shelter sites are important for species requiring extended periods of low mobility to digest meals (Siers
129 et al. 2018) or undergo ecdysis (Dodd and Barichivich 2007). Reptile studies often infer important areas
130 using the 50% use ("core area") contour from a kernel density home range estimation. Use of a more
131 intensive radio tracking regime allowed us to identify individual shelter sites, time spent within shelters,
132 and frequency of reuse.

133 We identified site reuse with the *recurse* package (v.1.1.0 Bracis et al. 2018). We defined each site as
134 a circular area with a radius equal to the mean GPS error recorded for each individual ($\bar{x} = 5.1 \pm 0.8$ m,
135 range = 3.5 – 10.0 m). When examining the frequency of revisits, we filtered out sites where the snake
136 was present for less than the mean time between data points (9 hours). We determined whether a site
137 was within the protected core area or the human-modified agricultural areas, then compared how
138 frequency of site reuse and time spent at a shelter differed between these areas. We used Man-Whitney
139 tests (we determined the data was non-normal with qq-plots) to compare differences at a population
140 level.

141 Time spent at sites (residency time) and the reuse rate (*recurse*) have direct connections to the extent of
142 animal space use, making them useful metrics to detect restrictions in movement (Van Moorter et al.
143 2016). To examine these two metrics we ran four Bayesian models in JAGS using the *jagsUI* package
144 (v.1.5.0 Kellner 2018). Two models used a log normal distribution to explore the impacts of proximity
145 to uncorrelated landscape features on log transformed residency time (Bracis et al. 2018). Two models
146 used a Poisson distribution to explore the impacts of proximity to uncorrelated landscape features on
147 revisit counts (Bracis et al. 2018). We determined spatial correlation in the landscape rasters and created
148 two groups of uncorrelated variables ($r < 0.6$) to use as predictors: 1) roads, forest, and settlements; 2)
149 roads, forest, and semi-natural areas.

150 Because of the variation between individuals, we used the individual ID as a random effect impacting
151 both models' intercepts and gradients. We excluded AM007 from models because he remained in the
152 forest; therefore, had little opportunity to display preference beyond forests or interact with landscape
153 features.

154 We used Cauchy and half Cauchy distributions (Lemoine 2019) as hyperparameters for the centre and
155 precision of normal distributions priors for individual random effects on distance to forest, semi-natural
156 areas, roads, settlements and water. We selected weakly informative priors based on the assumption
157 that King Cobras would follow similar movement patterns as those described in Tucker et al. (2018):
158 reduced movement associated with anthropogenic features. We made the prior for the effect of distance
159 to forest negative, reflecting the likely opposite effect from anthropogenic features proximity. We ran
160 all models using three chains over 20,000 interactions, with the first 5,000 discarded as burn-in and a
161 thinned factor of 50. Full JAGS models specifications can be found in at DOI:
162 10.5281/zenodo.3666029.

163 We identified convergence via \hat{R} values and traceplots. We evaluated model performance using DIC,
164 Bayes P-values, followed by visual inspection of posterior predictive check plots.

165 The *recurse* package also allowed us to quantify time spent in the protected core zone of the reserve.
166 Comparing movements to a shapefile of the reserve's protected zone allowed us to create a summary

167 of all boundary crossings (entrance and exit times). From the revisit data, we calculated overall time
168 spent in the core zone and plotted the use of the zone over time.

169 **Integrated Step-selection Function**

170 We explored King Cobra movements through the landscape with Integrated Step-Selection Functions
171 (ISSF) from the *amt* package (v.0.0.6 Signer et al. 2018), using the same distance from landscape
172 features rasters used in the above analyses. For ISSF, we inverted raster layers to guard against zero-
173 inflation in distance values and make interpretation of resulting effects more intuitive. We used the
174 landscape values at the endpoints in ISSF, because our sampling regime was temporally insufficient to
175 assume straight-line movements between locations. We produced 200 random locations per step, with
176 no resampling of data, because temporal resolution of our radio-tracking data was coarser than GPS
177 data allowing high numbers of random steps without requiring prohibitively intense computation.
178 Producing 200 random locations reduced the chance of missing rare landscape types, and made the best
179 use of high-resolution raster data (Thurfjell et al. 2014).

180 All nine models included step length and angle (Forester et al. 2009), with random step lengths and
181 angles drawn from gamma and von Mises distributions, respectively. One model only included step
182 length and angle as predictors, five models included step length, angle and distance from a landscape
183 feature, and three models included step length, angle and a combination of distances from multiple
184 uncorrelated landscape features. We selected models per individual using Aikike's Information
185 Criterion (AIC), discarding those with a $\Delta AIC > 2$ (Burnham and Anderson 2010). We did not model
186 average to produce a population level model, because we observed high individual heterogeneity. We
187 excluded AM007 from the ISSF analysis, because he never left forested areas.

188 **Software and data**

189 We completed all analysis in R (v.3.5.3 R Core Team 2019) and R Studio (v.1.2.1335 R Studio Team
190 2019). The full dataset, with code scripts, can be found at DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.3666029. Movement
191 data is also available on MoveBank (Movebank ID: 1093796277).

192 For data manipulation, we used R packages *broom* (v.0.5.2 Robinson and Hayes 2019), *data.table*
193 (v.1.12.2 Dowle and Srinivasan 2019), *dplyr* (v.0.8.3 Wickham et al. 2019), *forcats* (v.0.4.0 Wickham
194 2019a), *lubridate* (v.1.7.4 Grolemund and Wickham 2011), *openxlsx* (v.4.1.0 Walker 2018), *readr*
195 (v.1.3.1 Wickham et al. 2018), *reshape2* (v.1.4.3 Wickham 2007), and *stringr* (v.1.4.0 Wickham
196 2019b). We handled rasters and shapefiles with R packages *raster* (v.2.8.19 Hijmans 2019), *rgdal*
197 (v.1.4.3 Bivand et al. 2019) and *sp* (v.1.3.1 Pebesma and Bivand 2005, Bivand et al. 2013). For
198 visualisations we used R packages *cowplot* (v.0.9.4 Wilke 2019), *ggplot2* (v.3.2.1 Wickham 2009),
199 *ggpubr* (v.0.2 Kassambara 2018), *ggspatial* (v.1.0.3 Dunnington 2018), *scales* (v.1.1.0 Wickham and

200 Seidel 2019) and *scico* (v.1.1.0 Pedersen and Cramer 2018). To determine model convergence and
 201 evaluate model performance, we used the R packages *ggmcmc* (v.1.2 Fernández-i-Marín 2016),
 202 *ggridges* (v.0.5.1 Wilke 2018), and *tidybayes* (v.1.0.4 Kay 2019).

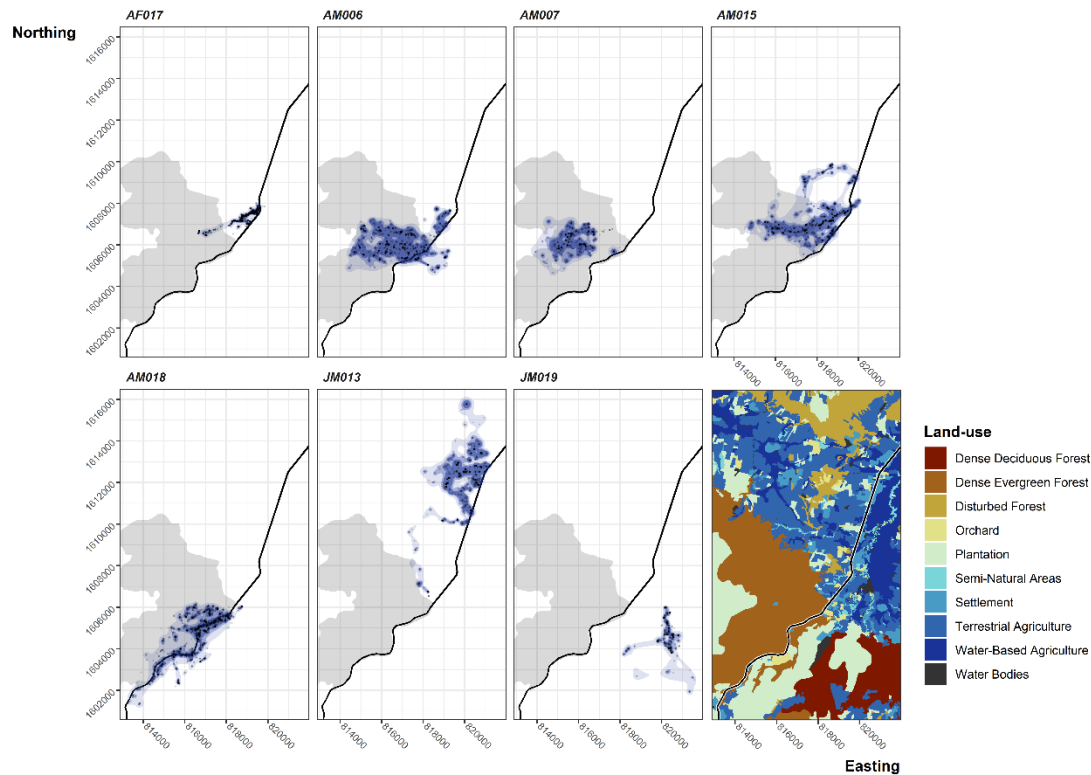
203 Results

204 We tracked seven King Cobras for an average of 649.7 ± 112.3 days (Table 1; all \pm indicated the standard
 205 error [SE] associated with the \bar{x} , calculated using the *pracma* package (v.2.2.5 Borchers 2019)) enabling
 206 us to use dynamic Brownian Bridge Movement Model analysis and explore impacts of land-use on
 207 movement. We tracked and located each King Cobra an average of 1834 ± 297.1 times, with an average
 208 of 8.5 ± 0.1 hours between fixes (range = 0.1 – 793.9 hours; Supplementary Figure 1). King Cobras
 209 occupied an average of 524 ± 104.5 unique locations, covering large areas in protected and unprotected
 210 areas (Table 1; Figure 1), with adult males tending to move more. The two juvenile males differed
 211 greatly from each other, likely the result of JM013’s northward travel. We only radio tracked a single
 212 adult female, which used the smallest area of any snake.

213 **Table 1. Summary of tracking and movements.** Datapoints = number of datapoints collected on an individual irrespective
 214 of move or not. Relocations = number of unique locations visited by an individual. Days = number of days tracked. Revisits
 215 frequency = the number of days between revisits to a previously used location (days tracked / count of reused locations). Time
 216 stationary = mean sheltering time \pm SE in days. dBBMM Range = range areas estimated using dBBMM 99%, 95%, and 90%
 217 contours. σ^2m = mean motion variance \pm SE. % Outside of PA = Percentage of total time tracked an individual was outside of
 218 the protected area.

ID	Datapoints	Days	Relocations	Revisit frequency	Time stationary	dBBMM Range (ha)			σ^2m	% outside PA
						90	95	99		
AF017	2245	774.97	728	3.19	1.84 ± 0.13	41.69	68.15	149.28	7.53 ± 0.33	91.53
AM006	2173	723.05	542	19.03	2.58 ± 0.27	519.60	701.44	1063.42	42.61 ± 1.74	15.49
AM007	969	320.66	220	12.83	2.61 ± 0.53	232.70	345.62	616.90	51.90 ± 3.81	0.67
AM015	1944	680.13	587	13.60	2.24 ± 0.22	379.80	603.32	1081.54	27.3 ± 1.22	67.57
AM018	3122	1176.10	985	7.79	2.16 ± 0.14	255.09	492.54	977.84	33.56 ± 1.41	42.39
JM013	1497	561.19	381	21.58	3.09 ± 0.39	354.33	533.26	972.74	22.35 ± 1.11	99.95
JM019	890	311.79	228	11.99	2.56 ± 0.37	61.01	119.04	390.39	7.90 ± 0.63	–

219

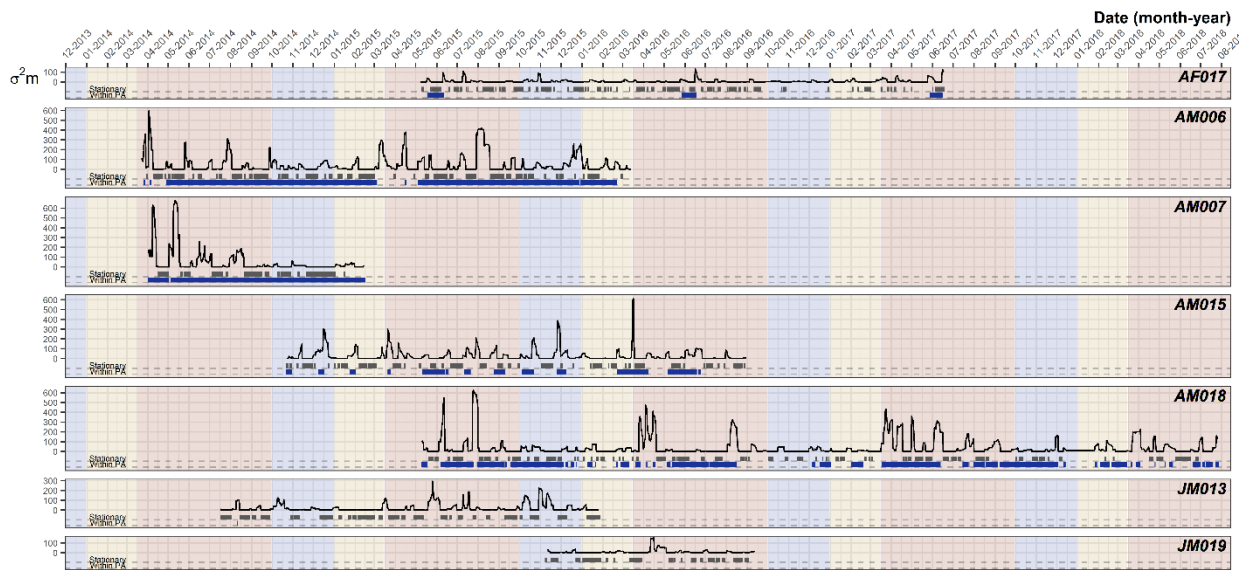


220

221 **Figure 1. Dynamic Brownian Bridge Movement Model estimates of utilisation distribution contours.** Areas displayed
222 with increasing levels of opacity are the 99%, 95% and 90% utilisation contours. Black dots show locations. The shaded
223 background area shows the protected core area. Dark central line is the four-lane 304 highway. Bottom right map shows the
224 land-use types in the area.

225 Our examination of seasonality using *segclust2D* suggested that five clusters and 23 segments was the
226 best way of dividing the 2012-2018 period into seasons. However, it resulted in seasons unique to single
227 years. Therefore, we manually simplified the seasons into three groups that appear in nearly all years:
228 hot ($\bar{x} = 33.8 \pm 2.8$ °C, $\bar{x} = 2.5 \pm 7.9$ mm rainfall), wet ($\bar{x} = 29.9 \pm 2.2$ °C, $\bar{x} = 5.9 \pm 11.1$ mm rainfall) and
229 dry ($\bar{x} = 29.0 \pm 3.5$ °C, $\bar{x} = 0.2 \pm 0.8$ mm rainfall).

230 Time spent in human disturbed areas varied dramatically between individuals and showed modest
231 seasonal patterns ($\bar{x} = 59.7 \pm 15.5\%$, range = 0.7 – 100%; Table 1, Figure 2). During the start of the hot
232 season (Figure 2 red highlight, February-April), adult males ventured out of protected forested areas, a
233 pattern particularly clear in AM006's movements. During other times of the year, snakes exhibited more
234 consistent use of the protected area, which coincided with more frequent long-term use of shelter sites
235 (Figure 2). The female, AM017, showed a consistent yearly pattern of entering the protected area via a
236 semi-natural area corridor that connected to a streambed.



237

238 **Figure 2. Motion variance of each individual over their tracking period.** Black lines show the motion variance values over
239 time. Grey bars indicate long-term sheltering behaviour (i.e., when the time sheltering was greater than the individual's mean
240 sheltering time). Blue bars indicate times when the individual was within the protected forested area. Shading shows the three
241 seasons: red = Hot, blue = Wet, yellow = Dry.

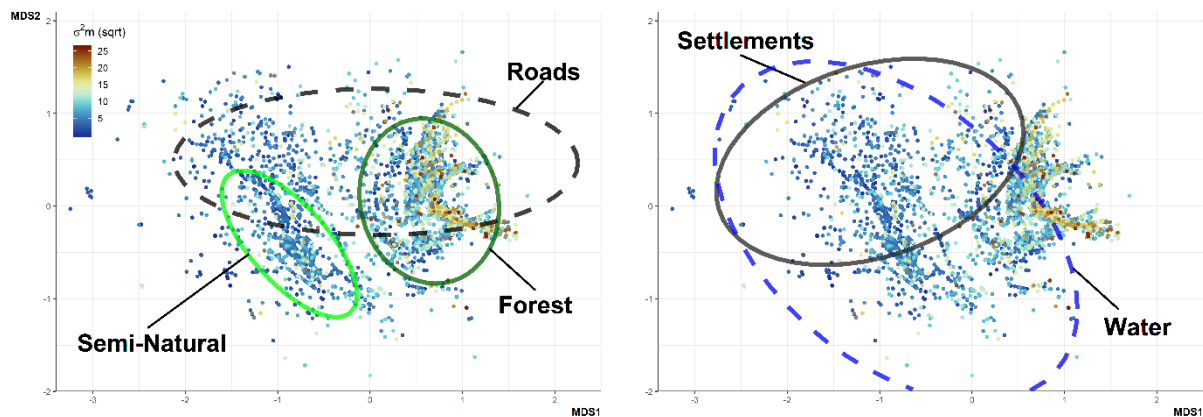
242 Motion variance

243 Mean motion variance differed among individuals ($\bar{x} = 27.9 \pm 0.6$ m, range = $5.6e^{-05} - 675.8$ m, Table
244 1). The largest motion variances belonged to adult males, characterized by larger movements
245 concentrated at the beginning of the hot season (Figure 2, red highlight). Juvenile males did not move
246 as far as adult males at any time of the year, but they did appear to be more active than the female,
247 AF017. Motion variance of AF017 peaked during the hot season, when she entered the protected area
248 in mid- to late-April and left in mid-May. All individuals displayed seasonal differences in motion
249 variance, with the lowest values during the dry season ($\bar{x} = 34.9 \pm 1.0$ σ^2 m) compared to hot ($\bar{x} = 22.1$
250 ± 0.8 σ^2 m) and wet seasons ($\bar{x} = 14.0 \pm 0.7$ σ^2 m; Figure 2).

251 Motion variance was highest in evergreen and disturbed forests ($\bar{x} = 38.9 \pm 1.1$, max = 665 m; $\bar{x} = 48.3$
252 ± 4.8 , max = 598 m), and lowest in orchards ($\bar{x} = 10.5 \pm 1.24$ m, max = 449), semi-natural areas ($\bar{x} =$
253 11.6 ± 0.6 , max = 347 m), and water bodies ($\bar{x} = 10.3 \pm 1.4$, max = 119 m).

254 Using NMDS, we successfully reduced dimensionality of chosen landscape features, revealing several
255 patterns. The clearest pattern was the grouping of higher motion variance values, the majority of which
256 arose when snakes were < 100 m from forested areas (Figure 3; see Supplementary Figure 2 for bi-
257 plot). In contrast to movement variance values near or within forests, NMDS revealed consistently
258 lower values within 100 m of semi-natural areas. All other covariates were more weakly associated with
259 particular motion variance values. Roads contained a wide array of values, which overlapped with forest
260 and semi-natural areas, suggesting a weaker impact on motion variance. Settlements and water bodies

261 revealed similarly weak associations to motion variance, but there was a tendency for motion variance
262 near or within settlements to be lower than those near or within forests.



263
264 **Figure 3. Non-metric multidimensional scaling plot.** Motion variance values are reflected by the colour of the points, we
265 have rooted these values so value differences are easier to distinguish. Ellipses indicate 95% of points within 100 m of a given
266 landscape feature. A) Ellipses highlight points existing within 100 m of forest, semi-natural areas, and roads. B) Ellipses
267 highlights points existing within 100 m of water, and settlements.

268 **Site fidelity and reuse**

269 The *recurse* analysis revealed that mean time spent at a shelter site (stationary for more than 9 hours)
270 was 2.3 ± 0.1 days (range = 0.4 – 43.5 days; Supplementary Figure 3), and all snakes demonstrated site
271 fidelity, revisiting a previously used site on average every 13.0 ± 2.4 days (range = 3.2 – 21.6 days;
272 Table 1).

273 Mann-Whitney U tests at a population level failed to detect significant differences in frequency of site
274 reuse between sites in core forest (median = 190.4) and anthropogenic areas (median = 99.1; $W = 13027$,
275 $n_1 = 99$, $n_2 = 250$, p -value = 0.4432 two-sided; Supplementary Figure 4). Similarly, time spent within
276 sites was not significantly different between core forest (median = 24.7) and anthropogenic areas
277 (median = 24.8; $W = 210410$, $n_1 = 398$, $n_2 = 1095$, p -value = 0.3087 two-sided; Supplementary Figure
278 5).

279 All models we ran to predict residency time and revisits converged and produced Bayes p -values close
280 to 0.5. All the models revealed that the distance to landscape features has a negligible effect on residency
281 time or revisit frequency, illustrated by all β coefficient 95% credible intervals values overlapping with
282 zero. Results of all Bayesian models can be found in Supplementary Table 1.

283 **Integrated Step-selection Function**

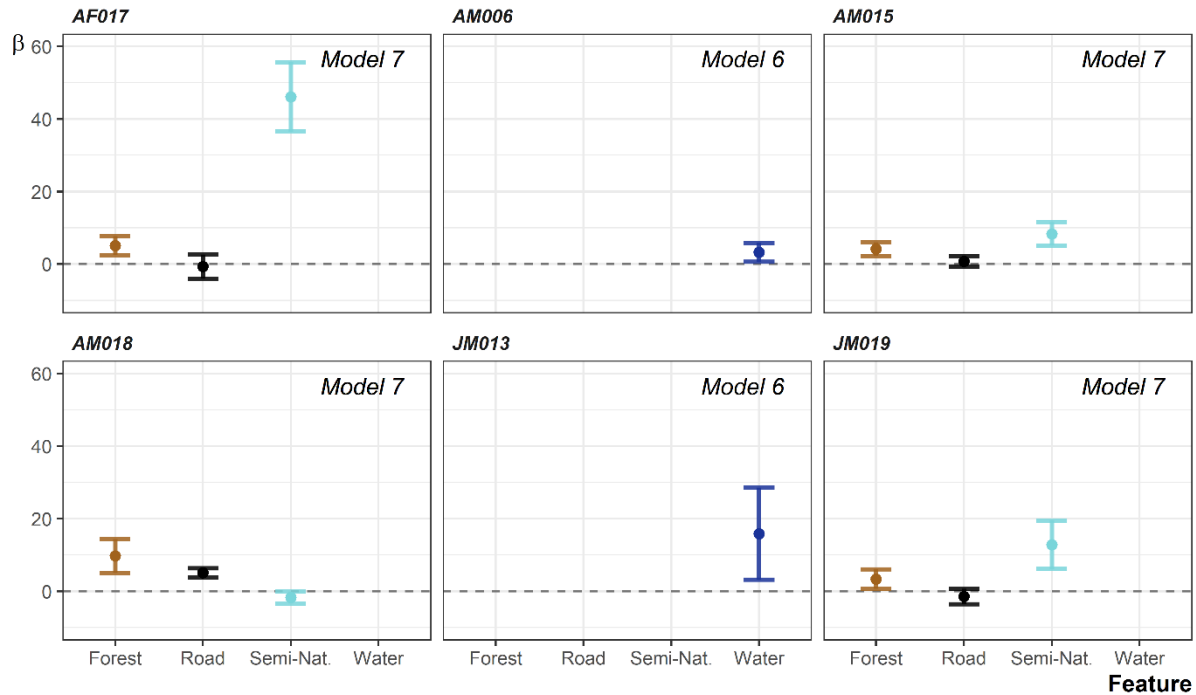
284 Individual movements of the King Cobras were best described by three models (Figure 4; Table 2; full
285 ISSF results can be found in Supplementary Table 2). Model 7 performed best for four individuals, and

286 included proximity to forest, roads, and semi-natural areas. Universally, the locations of AF017,
 287 AM015, AM018 and JM019 were positively associated with forests. However, the association between
 288 movements, roads, and semi-natural areas varied; AF017, AM015 and JM019 preferred semi-natural
 289 areas, but were inconsistently associated with roads. The movements of AM006, AM015, and AF017
 290 while in agricultural land exemplifies King Cobras' reliance on semi-natural areas (Figure 5). By
 291 contrast, AM018's locations were associated with roads, while weakly avoiding semi-natural areas. But
 292 for AM018 model 8 was within 2 Δ AIC. Model 8 replaced semi-natural areas with settlements as a
 293 predictor, indicating positive association ($\beta = 2.504$, 95% CI -0.244 – 5.253). Models targeting JM013's
 294 movements were similarly inconclusive, with four models achieving Δ AIC < 2 (including the null
 295 model), indicating distance to landscape feature was a poor predictor of movement. Finally, AM006's
 296 movements were best described by model 6, indicating a weak association with water bodies.

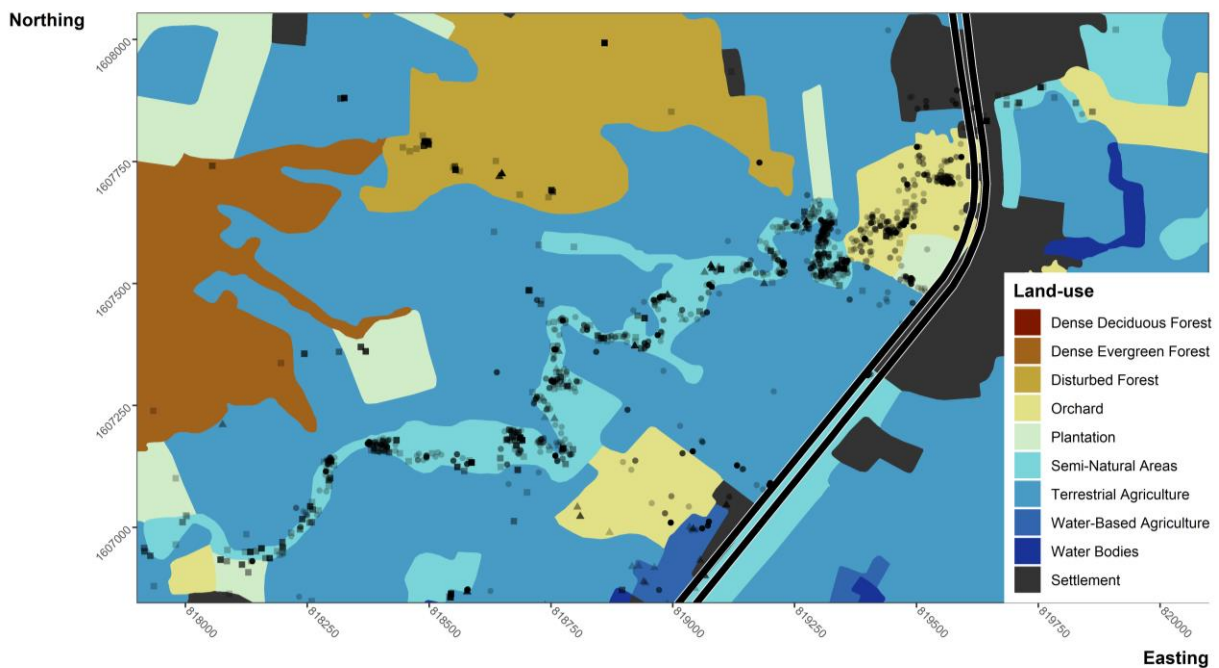
297 **Table 2. ISSF model formulation and AIC results.** sl = step length; ta = turning angle; dist_* = distance from forest,
 298 settlement, semi-natural area, road, and water. * and bold indicate the models < 2 Δ AIC from the top-performing model.

Model	Model formula, all begin with Model1 formulation	AF017	AM006	AM015	AM018	JM013	JM019
Model1	log_sl*cos_ta+strata(step_id_)	7573.47	5794.50	6205.87	10567.77	4014.21*	2402.41
Model2	Model1+dist_forest+dist_forest:log_sl+dist_forest:cos_ta	7555.47	5794.62	6187.03	10530.19	4013.58*	2399.25
Model3	Model1+dist_settle+dist_settle:log_sl+dist_settle:cos_ta	7542.05	5794.64	6201.81	10552.30	4014.60*	2402.45
Model4	Model1+dist_semiNat+dist_semiNat:log_sl+dist_semiNat:cos_ta	7492.52	5783.74	6186.73	10563.71	4017.76	2392.32
Model5	Model1+dist_road+dist_road:log_sl+dist_road:cos_ta	7557.50	5791.24	6201.98	10498.78	4017.31	2406.31
Model6	Model1+dist_water+dist_water:log_sl+dist_water:cos_ta	7566.34	5779.88*	6199.01	10559.55	4013.23*	2404.11
Model7	Model1+dist_road+dist_forest+dist_semiNat	7471.48*	5789.37	6171.16*	10471.26*	4017.55	2388.28*
Model8	Model1+dist_road+dist_forest+dist_settle	7539.43	5789.9	6195.03	10472.37*	4017.61	2400.04
Model9	Model1+dist_road+dist_forest+dist_water	7530.33	5789.75	6187.41	10474.02	4015.71	2398.12

299



300
 301 **Figure 4. The coefficients from the best performing integrated step-selection functions per individual.** Error bars show
 302 the 95% confidence interval. JM013 and AM018's had other models within 2 Δ AIC.



303
 304 **Figure 5. A map of land-use illustrating how King Cobra movements are largely occurring within semi-natural areas.**
 305 Displayed using semi-transparent points, are the locations of King Cobras across the entire study period. Circles = AF017,
 306 triangles = AM006, squares = AM015.

307 Discussion

308 We present some of the first evidence for how a large tropical reptile modifies its movements when in
 309 agricultural areas. Motion variance was characterized by seasonal peaks associated with breeding

310 activity, but generally showed decreased activity in agricultural areas. Reduced movement in
311 anthropogenic systems reflects meta-analyses of mammalian movements in anthropogenic systems
312 (Tucker et al. 2018). Research on reptile spatial ecology has documented either reduced space-use
313 (Mitrovich et al. 2009, Hoss et al. 2010, Breininger et al. 2011, Lomas et al. 2019) or reduced movement
314 (Parent and Weatherhead 2000, Corey and Doody 2010, Beale et al. 2016, Doherty et al. 2019) in
315 fragmented agricultural landscapes. But the response to fragmentation is not universal, other research
316 failed to detect significant shifts in movement patterns (Row et al. 2012, Wolf et al. 2013, Anguiano
317 and Diffendorfer 2015), or even revealed increased space-use in fragmented areas (Kapfer et al. 2010,
318 Ettling et al. 2013), potentially due to species-specific evolutionary history traits (Fahrig 2007). King
319 Cobras appeared to be reacting in a way consistent with forest specialists, or taxa that have evolved in
320 continuous habitat (Fahrig 2007) –limited boundary avoidance, large movements, and mortality in
321 human-dominated areas (Marshall et al. 2018). Landscape-specialist species occupying fragmented
322 areas likely face limited resources, resulting in restricted movements to more naturalistic corridors
323 (Dondina et al. 2019).

324 The clearest pattern we documented was preferential use of semi-natural vegetation patches when King
325 Cobras moved within agricultural areas. These patches primarily consist of dense vegetation arrayed
326 linearly along the banks of irrigation canals, and are used more frequently than the surrounding matrix
327 of agricultural fields, acting as movement corridors through the fragmented landscape. Linear habitats
328 potentially impact movements in other reptile species (Kay et al. 2016, Doherty et al. 2019). Doherty
329 et al. (2019) suggested that reduced movement by Eastern Bearded Dragons (*Pogona barbata*) was
330 partly driven by higher prey availability in linear vegetation patches. Although we lack direct evidence
331 suggesting semi-natural areas within agricultural landscapes host relatively higher prey abundance, it is
332 likely King Cobra prey can be found more frequently where vegetation and water are present (Murphy
333 et al. 1999, Barnes et al. 2017, Strine et al. 2018). However, increased movements in forests, at least
334 for some individuals, may indicate that resource availability alone fails to explain variation in
335 movement patterns. Intact forests are extremely valuable and present a resource-rich environment,
336 theoretically reducing the need for foraging movements (Wasko and Sasa 2012, Doherty and Driscoll
337 2018).

338 Ectotherms also have to consider the thermal qualities of habitats, shifting habitat usage to maximise
339 efficiency (Blouin-Demers and Weatherhead 2001, 2002). Compared to temperate regions, evidence
340 from the tropics that behavioural shifts are required to maximise thermoregulation is more ambiguous
341 (Luiselli and Akani 2002), but not unknown in larger species (Shine and Madsen 1996). Open fields
342 and vegetation corridors present two contrasting thermal environments. When temperatures are high
343 tropical snakes may need to seek cooler, covered, and environments potentially richer in shelter sites.

344 Utilisation of covered areas may also be tied to threat avoidance, as threats are known to influence
345 animal movement (Rio-Maior et al. 2019, Suraci et al. 2019). In our study area, roads pose a major
346 threat to many animals (Silva et al. 2020a). King Cobras also fall victim to both direct (Marshall et al.
347 2018) and indirect (Strine et al. 2014) human-caused mortality. However, we failed to detect clear
348 avoidance of roads or human settlements; King Cobras made use of suitable habitat types regardless of
349 their proximity to threatening landscape features. Similarly, patterns of site reuse remained consistent
350 in respect to proximity to landscape features. This suggests that the overarching driver of site residency
351 time and revisitation is largely independent of habitat, instead likely connected to cycles of ecdysis and
352 prey capture and digestion (Dodd and Barichivich 2007, Siers et al. 2018).

353 Building on our results, we suggest that future conservation research focus on landscape connectivity.
354 Irrigation canals and forest fragments may allow King Cobras to persist across areas largely separated
355 from protected forest. Research on landscape connectivity could be especially beneficial if paired with
356 an assessment of how threats can be effectively mitigated. The apparent lack of threat avoidance
357 illustrated by the studied King Cobras demands changes in human behaviour. For example, road
358 crossing structures in combination with fencing would likely help to mitigate the threat posed by roads
359 (Rytwinski et al. 2016). Whereas reducing persecution of King Cobras will require a change in current
360 negative perceptions (Shankar et al. 2013, Marshall et al. 2018) and improvements in humane snake
361 removal services, although the cost-effectiveness of snake removal services needs further quantification
362 (Devan-Song et al. 2016).

363 **Conclusion**

364 Our results indicate that limited areas in agricultural landscapes are suitable for King Cobras, resulting
365 in reduced movements that largely occur within vegetated patches along irrigation canals. Apparent
366 reliance on vegetated patches, in an otherwise hostile human-dominated matrix, mirror findings that
367 landscape heterogeneity and the presence of semi-natural vegetated features are required to maintain
368 reptile diversity (Nopper et al. 2017, Pulsford et al. 2017, Boesing et al. 2018). The vulnerability of
369 King Cobras in agricultural areas suggests that these areas may be acting as a population sink (Driscoll
370 et al. 2013, Marshall et al. 2018), which emphasises the importance of maintaining vegetated areas
371 within the landscape matrix to provide refuge from known mortality sources. Future research will assess
372 spatial composition of resources available to King Cobras, and whether reduced movement leads to
373 additional sub-lethal costs. More broadly, our findings suggest that wide-ranging reptiles can react to
374 landscape fragmentation in similar ways to terrestrial mammals. This is especially important, because
375 large snakes, such as King Cobras, fulfil underappreciated ecosystem roles (Miranda 2017). Their role
376 in top-down trophic structuring is likely comparable to mammals that typically receive more
377 conservation attention.

378

379 **Declarations**

380 **Acknowledgements**

381 We thank Nakhon Ratchasima Zoo, Dusit Zoo, and Zoological Park Organization under the Royal
382 Patronage of His Majesty the King, Thailand; along with Wirongrong Changphet, Doctor of Veterinary
383 Medicine (DVM); Wanlaya Tipkantha, DVM for their expertise in undertaking surgery on protected
384 species. We thank the National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department, Thailand for
385 supplying permits to study King Cobras. We thank the National Research Council of Thailand for
386 providing permits for the project. We thank the Suranaree University of Technology and the School of
387 Biology for supervising and funding the project, providing ethical approval, and general logistics. We
388 thank Pluemjit Boonpueng for assisting with paperwork and logistics. We thank Assistant Professor Dr.
389 Pantip Piyatadsananon, Vice director of Lower Northeast Regional Center of Geoinformatics and Space
390 Technology Development Agency for obtaining land use data. We thank the Institute of Animals
391 Scientific Purpose Development for supplying animal use licenses to C.T.S. and P.S. We thank Wildlife
392 Reserves Singapore Conservation Fund, National Scientific and Technological Development Agency,
393 and Herpetofauna Foundation for supplying funding and equipment. We thank the Thailand Institute of
394 Scientific and Technological Research and Sakaerat Environmental Research Station for the consistent
395 and crucial logistical support throughout the project. We thank the residents of Udom Sab for allowing
396 research to be undertaken across their land. We thank the Hook 31 Rescue teams for their tireless work
397 mitigating human-snake conflict and providing us with a number of King Cobras. We thank numerous
398 Sakaerat Conservation and Snake Education Team members for countless hours tracking King Cobras
399 throughout the landscape.

400 **Funding**

401 National Science and Technological Development Agency, Thailand; Wildlife Reserves Singapore;
402 Herpetofauna Foundation; Suranaree University of Technology.

403 **Availability of data and materials**

404 Data used in this study is available on Zenodo (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.3666029) and Movebank
405 (Movebank ID: 1093796277). The Zenodo repository also includes all R scripts used to run analysis
406 and generate figures.

407 **Author contributions**

408 *Conceptualization*, I.S., M.C., and C.T.S.; *Methodology*, I.S., M.C., C.T.S., and B.M.M.; *Formal*
409 *Analysis*, B.M.M., M.C., and I.S.; *Investigation*, C.T.S., I.S., M.C., M.D.J., C.W.H. and B.M.M.;
410 *Resources*, M.G., P.S., T.A., and S.W.; *Writing – Original Draft*, B.M.M., M.C., I.S., M.D.J., and
411 C.T.S.; *Writing – Review & Editing*, B.M.M., M.C., I.S., M.D.J., C.W.H., C.T.S., and M.G.;

412 *Visualisation*, B.M.M.; *Supervision*, P.S., S.W., and T.A.; *Funding Acquisition*, M.D.J., C.T.S., and
413 P.S.

414 **Competing interest**

415 We declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

416 **Ethics approval and consent to participate**

417 We had ethical approval from the Suranaree University of Technology Ethics Committee (24/2560).
418 All work was undertaken Institute of Animals for Scientific Purpose Development (IAD) licenses
419 belonging to P.S. and C.T.S. All work was permitted by the National Park, Wildlife and Plant
420 Conservation Department, Thailand and the National Research Council of Thailand (98/59). All work
421 was undertaken with permission from Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research and
422 Sakaerat Environmental Research Station.

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