

Malayan water monitor lizards at the Singapore Botanic Gardens

Subjects: Malayan water monitor, *Varanus salvator* (Reptilia: Sauria: Varanidae).

Subjects identified by: Contributor.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Singapore Botanic Gardens, by Swan Lake behind Tyersall Avenue; 22 April 2012 at around 1135 hrs, and 7 June 2014 at 1328 hrs.

Habitat: Parkland, by an artificial freshwater lake with concrete sides.

Observer: Contributor.

Observations: Two separate encounters are herein recorded.

1) A large individual of about 2 m total length was photographed on 7 June 2014 at 1328 hrs at the edge of the lake (Fig. 1). Appearing nervous when it sensed it was under observation, it quietly entered the water and swam to the shelter of some overhanging vegetation. Some red-eared sliders (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) basking close-by on a boulder under a pair of goose sculptures did not seem perturbed by its presence.

2) On 22 April 2012 at 1135 hrs, a single monitor of about 1.5 m long was seen 'sauntering' on a footpath by the lake (Fig. 2), apparently not disturbed by the contributor, who was following it only about 2 m away at its side. After about 10 m up the footpath, it turned to the side and went under the shelter of some trees where a larger individual of about 2 m length was devouring a rotting carcass of a softshell turtle. The smaller lizard appeared interested but kept its distance (Fig. 3).

Remarks: Malayan water monitors are versatile and readily adapt to human modified environments. They can be found all over Singapore from offshore islands and forests to the city (Baker & Lim, 2012: 89). In places where they are tolerated, like at the Botanic Gardens, individuals can be quite bold. There, apart from generating visitors' interest with their commanding presence, they also contribute to the maintenance of the lake and the general area by scavenging on the occasional dead turtle and fish.

Reference: Baker, N. & K. K. P. Lim, 2012. *Wild Animals of Singapore. A Photographic Guide to Mammals, Reptiles, Amphibians and Freshwater Fishes*. Updated edition. Draco Publishing and Distribution Pte. Ltd. and Nature Society (Singapore). 180 pp.



Fig. 1. A water monitor of about 2 m total length at the edge of Swan Lake on 7 June 2014, with basking red-eared sliders (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) in the background. Photograph by Kelvin K. P. Lim



Fig. 2. A water monitor of about 1.5 m total length sauntering on a footpath by the Swan Lake, at 1135 hrs on 22 April 2012.



Fig. 3. Two water monitors of between 1.5 and 2 m total length by the Swan Lake at 1141 hrs on 22 April 2012. The darker and larger individual at the rear was devouring a carcass of a softshell turtle.

Photographs by Kelvin K. P. Lim

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