

Malayan water monitor lizards wrestling at Botanic Gardens

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

Subjects identified by: Contributors.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Singapore Botanic Gardens, beside Swan Lake; 2 October 2014; around 1800 hrs.

Habitat: Parkland, among vegetation by an artificial freshwater lake.

Observers: Contributors.

Observation: Two individuals, each about 1.2 m in total length, were engaging in wrestling behaviour in the undergrowth by the lake (Fig. 1). They did not seem disturbed by the relatively high human traffic on the adjacent pathways, including several passers-by taking pictures of them. Both lizards were relatively evenly matched, although the individual in the foreground (Fig 2.) appeared to be dominating. The event lasted some 15 minutes. Finally, the monitor lizard in the foreground managed to topple its rival (Fig 3). The latter then ran away into the undergrowth with the former in pursuit.

Remarks: Malayan water monitors are extremely adaptable reptiles, able to thrive in jungle, mangrove, offshore, and even urban environments. (Baker & Lim, 2012: 89). Individuals in urban areas can become habituated to human presence, and their habits and behaviour thus easily observed.

Large monitors engage in ritualized fights to establish dominance over each other. They stand bipedally, gripping their opponents around the shoulders (which resemble hugging) and attempt to wrestle each other to the ground (Bennett, 1998: 40). As no biting is practiced during such combats, sparring lizards minimise the amount of physical injuries to each other. A pair of wrestling Malayan water monitors was also photographed at the Chinese Garden in Jurong on 21 August 2014 (Ee, 2014).

References:

- Baker, Nick and Kelvin 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.
- Bennett, D., 1998. *Monitor Lizards. Natural History, Biology & Husbandry*. Edition Chimaira, Frankfurt am Main. 352 pp.
- Ee, D., 2014. Monitor that lizard. *The Straits Times*. 25 October 2014: Home, B6.

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Fig. 1. Two Malayan water monitors engaging in wrestling behaviour beside Swan Lake. Photograph by Ananthanarayanan Sankar



Fig. 2. The two water lizards were relatively evenly matched. The wrestling continued for about 15 minutes, and the individual in the foreground seemed to be stronger. Throughout the fight, it kept pushing its rival towards the ground.



Fig. 3. In the end, the lizard in the foreground managed to topple its opponent. The latter ran away into the undergrowth with the former in pursuit.

Photographs by Ananthanarayanan Sankar