

Oriental pied hornbill preying on changeable lizard

Subjects: Oriental pied hornbill, *Anthracoceros albirostris* (Aves: Bucerotiformes: Bucerotidae);
Changeable lizard, *Calotes versicolor* (Reptilia: Sauria: Agamidae).

Subjects identified by: Contributor.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Pasir Ris Park; 2 May 2016; around 1720 hrs.

Habitat: Urban coastal parkland.

Observers: Contributor with Melissa Tang.

Observation: An adult male Oriental pied hornbill was observed catching and consuming a full-grown changeable lizard. The observers first saw the hornbill perched on a tree branch by a bicycle track. The bird flew to another tree around 20 metres away, and the observers followed. The flight also drew the attention of at least 12 other human onlookers who then gathered around the tree to watch the bird.

The hornbill spotted a changeable lizard clinging to the trunk of the tree, and proceeded to make a swoop at it. He missed, and the lizard retreated beneath the arc of a tree branch. The hornbill then moved from one branch to another to search for the lizard. When the lizard was spotted again, a second swoop was attempted, and the reptile was successfully caught with the bird's beak (Fig. 1). For a few minutes, the hornbill held firmly on to the lizard (Fig. 2). When the lizard struggled vigorously, the hornbill repositioned his hold on to the lizard's midsection (Fig. 3) and flicked the animal against a branch (Fig. 4), perhaps to knock it unconscious. When the lizard's struggling lessened, the hornbill proceeded to swallow it headfirst (Figs. 5 & 6).

Throughout the hunt and the consumption of the prey, the hornbill did not seem to be disturbed by the presence of the many human onlookers or their loud chatter.

Remarks: *Anthracoceros albirostris convexus* is the subspecies of the Oriental pied hornbill that is native to Singapore. It is found in the forested areas of the Bukit Timah and Central Catchment Reserves and Pulau Ubin, and has adapted to the urban environment (Cremades & Ng, 2012: 67) as shown by the bird in this observation. The species was first recorded in Singapore in 1855 by Alfred Russell Wallace, but its presence there was not confirmed again until the 1990s, when birds were observed on Pulau Ubin. Shortly after, these hornbills began to appear on Singapore Island (Lim, 2009: 67).

The Oriental pied hornbill forages in trees and is omnivorous. Its diet consists of fruits, insects and small vertebrates. Even crabs and fish have been recorded as prey items for these birds (Cremades & Ng, 2012: 68). The changeable lizard herein illustrated qualifies as a small vertebrate prey.

References:

- Cremades, M. & S. C. Ng, 2012. *Hornbills in the City. A Conservation Approach to Hornbill Study in Singapore*. National Parks Board, Singapore. 222 pp.
Lim K. S., 2009. *The Avifauna of Singapore*. Nature Society (Singapore) Bird Group Records Committee. 611 pp.

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Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.

Images extracted from video footage by Shu Shwu Li