

Oriental whip snake eating gecko

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Subjects: Oriental whip snake, *Ahaetulla prasina* (Reptilia: Squamata: Colubridae);
Spiny-tailed house gecko, *Hemidactylus frenatus* (Reptilia: Squamata: Gekkonidae).

Subjects identified by: Uwe Will & Nick Baker.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, on signboard at the open plaza near Neo Tiew Carpark, between the old section and new extension; 1 December 2017; 0819-0822 hrs.

Habitat: Parkland and mangrove vegetation.

Observer: Uwe Will.

Observation: A whip snake of about 110 cm total length was observed draped over the top of the signboard with the forepart of its body dangling on the side, and in the middle of swallowing a gecko (Fig. 1). It was first seen with the hind limbs and tail of the lizard sticking out of its mouth. It took less than two minutes for the prey to be completely swallowed. After that, the snake swung its head upwards (Fig. 2) and came to rest on the top of the signboard (Fig. 3).



Fig. 1. Lateral view of snake swallowing gecko at 0819 hrs.



Fig. 2. By 0821 hrs, the prey was completely swallowed.

Photographs by Uwe Will



Fig. 3. At 0822 hrs, the snake stopped to rest on top of the signboard. Photograph by Uwe Will

Remarks: *Ahaetulla prasina* reaches a total length of 1.9 m, and is usually ‘bright fluorescent green’ as adults and ‘yellow to pale brown’ as juveniles (Baker & Lim, 2012: 93; Lim & Lee, 1989: 67). At 1.1 m, the featured snake seems relatively large to be retaining the juvenile colour pattern. However, it appears that some individuals do not turn green as they grow. Tweedie (1983: 82) mentions that this species is usually green, but sometimes yellow-brown or creamy white, apparently regardless of size. Grismer (2011: 169) adds tan, yellow, gold, aqua-marine and orange to the range of exceptional colours. Non-green Oriental whip snake may be mistaken as the speckle-headed whip snake (*Ahaetulla fasciolata*). The latter species can be distinguished in being reddish brown with a prominent barred pattern and blackish markings on the top of its head (see Chow, 2017: 17-18; Sim & Sim, 2017: 94-95).

The prey in the featured observation is identified as *Hemidactylus frenatus* from the spines on the surface of the tail. Lizards, frogs and small birds are eaten by the Oriental whip snake (Baker & Lim, 2012: 93; Tweedie, 1983: 82). Additionally, the young have been known to feed on flies (Lim & Lee, 1989: 67).

References:

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- Lim, F. L. K. & M. T.-M. Lee, 1989. *Fascinating Snakes of Southeast Asia - an Introduction*. Tropical Press Sdn. Bhd., Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. xviii + 124 pp.
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