

Consumption of a softshell turtle by Malayan water monitors

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Subjects: Malayan water monitor, *Varanus salvator* (Reptilia: Squamata: Varanidae);
Chinese softshell turtle, *Pelodiscus sinensis* (Reptilia: Testudines: Trionychidae).

Subjects identified by: Webster Cheong.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Mandai Lake Road, compound of River Safari; 16 May 2020; 0935 & 1428 hrs.

Habitat: Man-made clearing along the edge of a freshwater lake (Upper Seletar Reservoir).

Observers: Webster Cheong and Heng Yirui.

Observations: A water monitor of approximately 1.1 m total length was seen consuming the carcass of a softshell turtle (Fig. 1). The head of the turtle was already missing at first sighting; presumably consumed by the lizard earlier. The monitor inserted its head into the body cavity several times to reach the flesh and organs (Fig. 2). A second monitor of similar size to the first appeared at the scene about 23 minutes later at 0958 hrs (Fig. 3). The first monitor responded aggressively by hissing and head twitches whenever the second monitor approached too close. The second monitor retreated several metres away while the first continued eating. After 33 minutes, the observers left and returned at 1428 hrs. A third and smaller monitor was consuming the carcass (Fig. 4). The second monitor was resting several metres away, while the first was no longer present. None of the lizards were observed attempting to bite or tear at the limbs of the carcass.

Remarks: Malayan water monitors are known to be generalist, often opportunistic feeders (Kulabtong & Mahaprom, 2015). While this species of lizard is native to Singapore, the Chinese softshell turtle is not and most likely the result of mercy release (Baker & Lim, 2012: 126). The observers were unable to ascertain if the turtle in the observation was killed by a monitor lizard, or if it was already dead and then scavenged by the lizards.



Fig. 1. First water monitor consuming turtle carcass. Photograph by Heng Yirui



Fig. 2. The first lizard inserting its head into the turtle's body cavity to reach flesh and internal organs. Photograph by Heng Yirui



Fig. 3. The second lizard approaching the turtle carcass while the first was busy feeding. Photograph by Heng Yirui

References:

- Baker N & Lim KKP (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.
- Kulabtong S & Mahaprom R (2015). Observation on food items of Asian water monitor, *Varanus salvator* (Laurenti, 1768) (Squamata, Varanidae), in urban ecosystem, Central Thailand. Biodiversity Journal, 6 (3): 695-698.

Fig. 4. The third and smallest lizard at the turtle carcass, observed at 1428 hrs. Photograph by Webster Cheong

