

Biodiversity Record: Unusually bold behaviour exhibited by a wild Sunda colugo

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Subjects: Sunda colugo, *Galeopterus variegatus* (Mammalia: Dermoptera: Cynocephalidae).

Subjects identified by: Craig Justin Tan.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Mandai Lake Road, compound of Singapore Zoo; 18 November 2020; 1815 hrs.

Habitat: Suburban parkland and secondary forest.

Observer: Craig Justin Tan.

Observation: A wild male colugo infant was found weak on a pathway at the Australasia exhibit in the Singapore Zoo and brought by a member of the zoo staff to Mandai Wildlife Group's Wildlife Healthcare and Research Centre at 1700 hrs. The infant was dead on arrival. It weighed 76 grams; its eyes had already opened and fur was beginning to grow on the body. A post-mortem examination revealed that the young colugo had sustained and succumbed to traumatic injuries, with a blood clot visible in the abdomen (Fig. 1). In an attempt to gather history on the incident, at 1815 hrs, the author visited the site where the young colugo had been found. A preliminary check revealed no colugos in the area, but after about two minutes, a wild adult colugo with grey pelage was seen on a tree by which the author had earlier passed. The colugo seemed interested in the author's presence, fixing its gaze on him (Fig. 2). It began to approach the author by climbing the adjacent trees, and behaved as if it wanted to jump onto the author (Fig. 3). The author backed away while continuing to observe and film the colugo. It then glided (Fig. 4), landed on the ground and made a series of leaps in the direction of the author, covering an estimated 3 m of ground (Fig. 5). After the fifth bound, the colugo was about 1 m away from the author before it climbed onto a nearby tree. The author then left the area.

Remarks: The death of the young colugo and the unusually bold behaviour of the adult are believed to be linked. It is suspected that the young colugo sustained fatal injuries by losing its grip and falling off its mother while the latter was in mid-glide, and crashing to the ground from a considerable height. Two assumptions are made regarding the adult colugo: 1) it was a female due to its greyish fur (Lim, 2007: 21), and 2) it was the mother of the dead young colugo. The latter is made based on the proximity between the area where the young colugo was found fatally injured on the ground, and the trees where the adult colugo was observed, which is estimated at 10 m. Lim (2007: 62) notes that a "strong bond exists between female colugos and their unweaned young", and estimates that the young stays with its mother for approximately six months. Maternal behaviour has been observed with adult female colugos reclaiming rescued neonates that had fallen off them (pers. obs.; pers. comm. with Charlene Yeong and Ong Chew Chuan in 2019 and 2021). It is suspected that the adult colugo deliberately made its way to the palm trees upon spotting the author, probably with the intent to retrieve its baby. It should be noted that the author and the zoo personnel who picked up the injured juvenile were wearing the same uniform. This suggests that the adult colugo may have misidentified the author for the person whom it might have seen taking its young. It is not known what the adult colugo would have done if the author had allowed it to jump onto him.



Fig. 1. Ventral view of the young Sunda colugo, with a blood clot visible in the abdomen indicated by the arrow. (Photograph by: Craig Justin Tan).



Fig. 2. Adult Sunda colugo fixing its gaze on the author. (Photograph by: Craig Justin Tan).



Fig. 3. Adult Sunda colugo attempting to jump onto the author. (Screen grab from video by: Craig Justin Tan).



Fig. 4. Adult Sunda colugo gliding and landing on the ground. (Screen grab from video by: Craig Justin Tan).



Fig. 5. Adult Sunda colugo making a series of leaps towards the author. (Screen grab from video by: Craig Justin Tan).

Literature cited:

Lim NT-L (2007) Colugo. The Flying Lemur of South-east Asia. Draco Publishing Pte Ltd, Singapore, 78 pp.