

Biodiversity Record: Predation of ashy tailorbird by paradise gliding snake

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Subjects: Paradise gliding snake, *Chrysopelea paradisi* (Reptilia: Squamata: Colubridae);
Ashy tailorbird, *Orthotomus ruficeps* (Aves: Passeriformes: Cisticolidae).

Subjects identified by: Tan Robbin.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve; 30 May 2022; around 1135 hrs.

Habitat: Mangroves. On a shrub around one-metre tall, below a wooden hide used for bird-watching. During low tide.

Observer: Nithil Chakravarthy Thirumurugan.



Fig 1. Paradise gliding snake with jaws clamped over the upper torso of a fledgling ashy tailorbird. Fig. 2. Note the bulge in the snake's neck which appears to be the swallowed head of the bird. (Photographs by: Nithil Chakravarthy Thirumurugan).

Observation: On the shrub where a tailorbird's nest was located, three fledgling ashy tailorbirds, each about 5–8 cm, were perched at different spots around the shrub, calling incessantly. The commotion led the observer to spot a paradise gliding snake of about 1 m total length right under the tailorbird's nest. The snake was suspended from a branch with its jaws clamped over the upper torso of a fledgling tailorbird which was motionless (Figs. 1 & 2). A lump in the snake's throat appeared to be the head of the bird that the snake had already swallowed (Fig. 2). Apparently having some difficulty

consuming the bird with its anterior body dangling in mid-air, the snake tried to pull itself up onto the branch. Two adult ashy tailorbirds (Fig. 3), each about 11–14 cm, and presumably the parents, suddenly appeared on the scene. Vocalising loudly, they started attacking the snake. Seemingly caught by surprise, the snake promptly regurgitated its prey, which dropped to the ground, and the reptile proceeded to slither away into dense vegetation nearby. The other juvenile tailorbirds in the tree appeared still to be in distress, shivering and continuing to vocalise loudly.

Remarks: The paradise gliding snake is known to eat a variety of small animals. In Singapore, it has been recorded consuming lizards (Morgany, 2018; Tan & Chapman, 2019; Thio, 2021) and bats (Chan & D’Rozario, 2013; Goh, 2019). The featured observation shows that small birds also form part of its diet. The snake is likely to have swallowed the entire fledgling if the adult birds had not interrupted its meal. It is not known if the bird was plucked from the nest, or attacked while it was exploring the surroundings with its three siblings.

Literature cited:

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Fig 3. Lateral view of one of the adult ashy tailorbirds at the site. (Photograph by: Nithil Chakravarthy Thirumurugan).