

Biodiversity Record: Apparent predation of adult changeable lizard by juvenile water monitor

Chan Sow-Yan* & Lau Wing Lup

Email: chansowyan@gmail.com (*corresponding author), suiseki1984@yahoo.com.sg

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Subjects: Malayan water monitor, *Varanus salvator* (Reptilia: Squamata: Varanidae),
Changeable lizard, *Calotes versicolor* (Reptilia: Squamata: Agamidae).

Subjects identified by: Chan Sow-Yan and Lau Wing Lup.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Buangkok Crescent; 29 July 2019; around 1135 hrs.

Habitat: Urban. Grass patch along a winding road in a high-rise housing estate.

Observer: Lau Wing Lup.

Observation: A juvenile water monitor of about 50 cm total length was spotted on grass patch below a traffic signage (Fig. 1). Upon closer observation, it was noted to have its jaws clamped on the neck of a changeable lizard that was slightly smaller (Figs. 2 & 3). The changeable lizard appeared motionless but devoid of any obvious injuries during the entire encounter. As the observer approached for a closer view, the water monitor carried the lizard away and disappeared under the shrubbery.



Fig. 1. The lizards (indicated by arrow) under a signpost beside the road. Fig. 2. Top view of juvenile water monitor with jaws clamped onto the neck of an adult changeable lizard. (Photographs by: Lau Wing Lup).



Fig. 3. Closer view of both lizards. Note the apparently dead changeable lizard does not have any obvious injuries. (Photograph by: Lau Wing Lup).

Remarks: According to Traeholt (1993), the primary hunting method of *Varanus salvator* is ‘open pursuit’ rather than ambushing and stalking. Prey is always devoured front end first and is often killed before it is devoured. Besides eating live prey, *Varanus salvator* has an extremely broad diet and will scavenge on dead animals as well as food leftovers from residents and tourists (Traeholt, 1994; Lim, 2014). The capture and consumption of a relatively large prey by a juvenile water monitor was shown by a recent predation event involving a water snake, *Gerarda prevostiana*, at the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve (Koh, 2023).

The featured observation is but a snapshot that seems to imply that the changeable lizard was captured and killed by the juvenile water monitor with the intent to eat it. However, this cannot be proven as what happened before and after the scene were not seen. It is entirely possible that the juvenile monitor caught and killed the changeable lizard, but it is also equally plausible for the changeable lizard to already be dead when the monitor chanced upon it, which could explain the apparent lack of external injuries on the dead lizard. It thus cannot be confirmed if the observation represents a predation event, or a scavenging event.

Literature cited:

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