

Biodiversity Record: Predation of suspected shrew-faced squirrel by common Malayan racer

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Subjects: Common Malayan racer, *Coelognathus flavolineatus* (Reptilia: Squamata: Colubridae);
Shrew-faced squirrel, *Rhinosciurus laticaudatus* (Mammalia: Rodentia: Sciuridae).

Subjects identified by: Chen Jing Hui, Bryan Seah and Nick Baker.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Mandai Track 15; 26 May 2023, 2130 hrs.

Habitat: Secondary forest.

Observers: Marc Ong, Chen Jing Hui, Emmanuel Goh, Bryan Seah, Zoe Lim, Jolene Lim, Ilan Chanani-Parikh, Robbin Tan, Ethan Lai and Gabrielle Poh.

Observation: At around 2130 hrs, a common Malayan racer of about 1.2 m total length was found coiled around a small mammal near the trail (Fig. 1). The observers left the area when the snake uncoiled from its prey and commenced swallowing the brownish bushy-tailed mammal (Fig. 2). They returned at around 2200 hrs when the snake had devoured the prey up to its vent. Some of the observers tried to approach the snake for a closer view but accidentally stepped on twigs which caused them to snap. This apparently startled the snake, which caused it to regurgitate the prey item partially. The observers dimmed the lights and back-tracked a little, allowing the snake to resume swallowing its prey. Close-up photos were obtained while the tail of the prey was still visible (Figs. 3–6). By around 2230 hrs, the snake had fully ingested the mammal and retreated deeper into the vegetation.



Fig. 1. Initial sighting of the racer coiled around the mammalian prey. (Photograph by: Chen Jinghui).



Fig. 2. Snake uncoiled from its prey and commenced swallowing it head first. The prey (outlined in white), laying on its side, is brown on the back and sides, with a whitish underside, and has a bushy tail. (Screenshot from video by: Chen Jinghui).

Remarks: The common Malayan racer (*Coelognathus flavolineatus*) is a widespread snake that inhabits lowland forests, agricultural areas and parklands (Das, 2010). It has even been found within buildings (Tan, 2014). In Singapore, it is considered to be uncommon (Baker & Lim, 2012) or rare (Figueroa et al., 2023). This observation appears to corroborate the claim by Baker & Lim (2012) that this snake subdues its prey by constriction.

Unfortunately, as none of the observers have managed to obtain a clear image of the prey's head and body, its identity cannot be fully ascertained. Nevertheless, available images (Figs. 2–5) of the prey and its tail narrow the choices down to squirrel and treeshrew, with the shrew-faced squirrel (*Rhinosciurus laticaudatus*) apparently being the most likely candidate. Note in particular the colouration of the body (Fig. 2) and the appearance of the tail (Fig. 3) and compare these with the image of a freshly dead shrew-faced squirrel from Bukit Timah in Lim & Yeo (2012: fig. 1b).



Fig. 3. Snake having fully devoured the torso of the prey, and working on the tail. (Photograph by: Bryan Seah)



Fig. 4. Lateral view of the snake with the body of the prey distending the anterior part of its body. (Photograph by: Emmanuel Goh).



Fig. 5. Final stages of predation. (Screenshot of video by: Zoe Lim) Fig. 6. Prey almost completely ingested. (Photograph by: Robbin Tan).

The shrew-faced squirrel is considered to be 'critically endangered' in Singapore (Lim et al., 2008). It is described to be typically terrestrial (Lim & Yeo, 2012), which could explain its capture by a *Coelognathus flavolineatus*, a snake that is also typically observed to be terrestrial (Tan, 2014; Groenewoud, 2016; Fung & Low, 2018; present record). Several sightings of the shrew-faced squirrel have emerged in the Central Catchment Nature Reserves since 2011 (Lim & Yeo, 2012), with the most recent sighting by Ong & Yoganand (2022).

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