

Biodiversity Record: Attempted predation of black-headed collared snake by Malayan water monitor

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Subjects: Malayan water monitor, *Varanus salvator* (Reptilia: Squamata: Varanidae);
Black-headed collared snake, *Sibynophis melanocephalus* (Reptilia: Squamata: Colubridae).

Subjects identified by: Kamalakannan Raja.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, MacRitchie Reservoir Park; 11 September 2021; 1300–1310 hrs.

Habitat: Edge of secondary forest by an artificial freshwater lake.

Observer: Krishnasamy Raja.

Observation: A juvenile Malayan water monitor of about 30 cm total length was encountered holding an adult black-headed collared snake in its mouth (Fig. 1) on the shore of MacRitchie Reservoir. The snake was alive and held by its midsection. There were no visible injuries on the snake, and it did not exhibit any form of defensive behaviour towards the water monitor. This observation occurred right next to a boardwalk, and the presence of people spooked the monitor into taking a few short dashes away with the snake still in its jaws. The observer did not stay to observe if the lizard had eventually killed and consumed the snake, or if the prey was abandoned.

Remarks: An opportunist, the Malayan water monitor is known to consume a wide variety of prey (Das, 2010), and even scavenge on carrion (Baker & Lim, 2012). While many predation observations of Malayan water monitors involve fish or reptile eggs (Traeholt, 1993), there have been a few novel instances of predations on snakes. These include the dog-faced water snake (*Cerberus schneiderii*) (Tan, 2020) and Gerard's water snake (*Gerarda prevostiana*) (Koh, 2023).

According to the third edition of the Singapore Red Data Book (National Parks Board, 2023) the prey in this observation, the black-headed collared snake, is classed as 'vulnerable'.

This observation of a juvenile Malayan water monitor attempting a predation on an adult black-headed collared snake could be the first observation of an interaction between these two native species.

Literature cited:

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.

Das I (2010) A Field Guide to the Reptiles of South-east Asia. New Holland Publishers, United Kingdom, 376 pp.

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National Parks Board (2023) Reptiles. Singapore Red Data Book, 3rd edition. <https://www.nparks.gov.sg/biodiversity/wildlife-in-singapore/species-list/reptile> (Accessed 26 June 2023).

Tan CJ (2020) Malayan Water Monitor preying on dog-faced water snake. *Singapore Biodiversity Records*, 2020: 58.

Traeholt C (1993) Notes on the feeding behaviour of the water monitor, *Varanus salvator*. *Malayan Nature Journal*, 46: 229–241.



Fig 1. Juvenile monitor with an adult collared snake in its mouth. (Screengrab from video: Krishnasamy Raja).