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Biodiversity Record: Possible predatory raid on a nest of the red-eared slider

Chin Yu Xun

Email: e0540415@u.nus.edu

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Subject: Red-eared slider, *Trachemys scripta elegans* (Reptilia: Testudines: Emydidae).

Subject identified by: Chin Yu Xun.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Kent Ridge Park; 17 October 2023, around 1010 hrs.

Habitat: Urban parkland. At the south-west bank of the park's freshwater pond where the perimeter was lined by shrubs and a few trees. On a stretch of lawn of around 5 and 10 m between the pond and a footpath.

Observer: Chin Yu Xun.

Observation: An adult female red-eared slider was found excavating a hole on the ground with her hind legs (Fig. 1) about 3 m from the water's edge. The nest site was shaded by simpoh air (*Dillenia suffruticosa*) shrubs and resam fern (*Dicranopteris linearis*). The subject was observed digging for about 20 minutes before the observer left. When he returned about an hour later (around 1130 hrs), the observer found that turtle had disappeared, and the hole was covered with earth. It was assumed that eggs had been laid and the turtle had back-filled the hole. The observer marked the nest site, intending to return to check on it.

Seven days later, on 24 October 2023, the observer returned to the nest site at 1558 hrs to find that the nest had been disturbed. The once covered hole had been excavated. The depression was about 5 cm deep and 10 cm wide (Fig. 2). The observer dug further into the hole with twigs but failed to find any eggs.

Remarks: The featured observation is interesting for it implies that the turtle's nest was raided, possibly by an egg predator. The most likely candidate is the Malayan water monitor (*Varanus salvator*). This large lizard is present in the area (see Tan, 2016) and is known to dig up and eat turtle eggs (see Grismer, 2011). The absence of shell remnants at the site could point to the turtle having not deposited any eggs (note that egg laying was not observed), or that all the eggs were dug up and consumed a day or two after they were laid. The latter scenario seems more likely for an excavation would only have taken place if eggs was detected by the predator.

In Singapore, the red-eared slider is a common alien species that is known to successfully reproduce in the wild (see Chong & Yeo, 2022), and in captivity without special provisions (Leong & Lim, 2014; Pocklington, 2022). The likely raid on the nest suggests that natural mechanisms are present in the local environment to control the population.

Literature cited:

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Fig. 1. Lateral view of the red-eared slider on 17 October 2023 in the process of excavating a hole to lay her eggs (Photograph by: Chin Yu Xun).

Fig. 2. Top view of the nest site on 24 October 2023 which appears to have been excavated (Photograph by: Chin Yu Xun).