

Crested serpent eagle preying on oriental whip snake

Subjects: Crested serpent eagle, *Spilornis cheela* (Aves: Accipitriformes: Accipitridae).
Oriental whip snake, *Ahaetulla prasina* (Reptilia: Serpentes: Colubridae).

Subjects identified by: Contributor

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Singapore Botanic Garden; 14 March 2014; 1220 hrs.

Habitat: Urban parkland.

Observers: Rowenna Loh, Lois Yong & Noel Thomas.

Observation: At 1220 hrs, a crested serpent eagle was observed landing on a grassy slope with an oriental whip snake in its talons. The snake was still alive and writhing. The eagle first bit the back of the snake's head, presumably killing the prey (Fig 1). It then proceeded to feed on selected parts of the snake while grasping it firmly in its talons (Fig 2).

At 1501 hrs in the same area, the snake was found partially eaten and abandoned (Fig 3). It was retrieved for documentation purposes. Injuries were found mostly on the posterior ventral side of the snake. The specimen was then deposited in the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research at the National University of Singapore, under catalogue number ZRC 2.7057.

Remarks: The crested serpent eagle occurs in Singapore both as a very rare resident and a non-breeding visitor from neighbouring areas. It is found mainly in forest and old plantations, and is a well-known predator of reptiles, particularly tree snakes (Yong et al., 2013: 36).

Reference: Yong D. L., K. C. Lim & T. K. Lee, 2013. *A Naturalist's Guide to the Birds of Singapore*. John Beaufoy Publishing Limited, Oxford, England. 176 pp.



Fig 1. Crested serpent eagle biting the back of the snake's head. Photograph by Rowenna Loh



Fig 2. Crested serpent eagle feeding on choice parts of the snake. Photograph by Rowenna Loh



Fig. 3. Remains of the partially eaten Oriental whip-snake (ZRC 2.7057). Photograph by Noel Thomas

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