

Variable squirrel feeding on green ebony

Subjects: Variable squirrel, *Callosciurus finlaysonii* (Mammalia: Rodentia: Sciuridae);
Green ebony, *Jacaranda obtusifolia rhombifolia* (Magnoliophyta: Bignoniaceae).

Subjects identified by: Contributors.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Bidadari Cemetery; 29 November 2015; around 0900-1000 hrs.

Habitat: Urban parkland.

Observers: Contributors.

Observations: Two individuals of the variable squirrel were observed in the canopy of a *Jacaranda obtusifolia rhombifolia* tree. One, which had a twig in its mouth, disappeared into the upper canopy before it could be photographed. The other individual was observed actively feeding on flowers (Fig. 1), bark (Fig. 2) and seed pods (Figs. 3-4) of the tree.

Remarks: Although native to Thailand and Indochina, a thriving colony of the variable squirrel has been established in the parkland around the Aljunied and Bidadari areas since the 1990s (Baker & Lim, 2012). The feral population seems to be derived from released or escaped pets. The Bidadari area is slated for urban re-development. This may displace the variable squirrels there, and possibly force them to spread into the Central Catchment Nature Reserve (Neo, 2014). There is concern that should it flourish in the Central Catchment Nature Reserve, it may threaten native squirrel species with competition for food and habitat.

The present observations show that *Jacaranda obtusifolia rhombifolia* is a food source for the non-native variable squirrel. This roadside tree, which is also not native to Singapore, has been found growing in the forest of the Central Catchment Nature Reserve (Lok et al., 2008).

References:

- Baker, N. & K. K. P. Lim, 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.
- Lok, A. F. S., K-X. Tan, X. Giam, T. P. Ng & H. T. W. Tan, 2008. The spread of *Jacaranda obtusifolia* Humb. & Bonpl. (Bignoniaceae) into the Central Catchment Nature Reserve, Singapore. *Nature in Singapore*. 1: 143-147.
- Neo C. C., 2014. Bidadari development could force squirrels out, threaten native species. *Today*. 8 January, 2014. <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/bidadari-development-could-force-squirrel-out-threaten-native-species> [accessed on 30 November 2015]

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Fig. 1. Variable squirrel feeding on *Jacaranda* flower. Top photograph by Jeremy W. L. Yeo, bottom photograph by Marcus A. H. Chua



Fig. 2. Variable squirrel chewing on the bark of a twig of *Jacaranda*. Photograph by Tan Heok Hui



Fig. 3. Variable squirrel biting off the seed pod of *Jacaranda*. Photographs by Tan Heok Hui



Fig. 4. Variable squirrel consuming seed pod of *Jacaranda*. Top two photographs by Tan Heok Hui, bottom photograph by Jeremy W. L. Yeo