

Red-tailed racer predating on plantain squirrel

Maxine Tan Mei Quan

Maxinetan.mq@gmail.com

Subjects: Red-tailed racer, *Gonyosoma oxycephalum* (Reptilia: Squamata: Colubridae);
Plantain squirrel, *Callosciurus notatus* (Mammalia: Rodentia: Sciuridae).

Subjects identified by: Maxine Tan Mei Quan.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Central Catchment Nature Reserve, MacRitchie forest; 23 August 2017; around 1045 hrs.

Habitat: Secondary lowland rainforest.

Observer: Maxine Tan Mei Quan.

Observation: A red-tailed racer of about 2 m total length was observed on the wet ground, in the middle of a forest trail, trying to consume a dead adult plantain squirrel (Fig. 1). Fellow passers-by who had witnessed the event earlier, claimed that the snake had fallen from the tree above the trail with the squirrel. For ten to 13 minutes, it struggled to swallow the squirrel (Fig. 2). It then moved off the trail, pulling the squirrel along (Fig. 3), approximately one metre up a short slope and onto the shaded forest floor (Fig. 4). There, among tree roots and leaf litter, it eventually swallowed its prey. It was cloudy during the observation.

Remarks: As illustrated by the featured observation, the red-tailed racer inhabits forest where it is arboreal, diurnal and feeds mainly on birds and small mammals (Baker & Lim, 2012: 103; Das, 2010: 280). The squirrel could have been caught by the snake and killed by constriction while both were up in the tree. It seems the snake's difficulty in consuming its prey could be due to its exposed (and thus vulnerable) position in the middle of the trail. Only after it had moved to a shaded and more secluded location off the trail did the snake manage to swallow the squirrel.



Fig. 1. Snake on the trail with a dead squirrel.



Fig. 2. Snake struggling to swallow its prey.

Photographs by Maxine Tan Mei Quan

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.

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



Fig. 3. The snake dragging the squirrel as it moves off the trail.



Fig. 4. The snake among tree roots about 1 m off the trail, where it continued to swallow its prey.

Photographs by Maxine Tan Mei Quan