

Attempted predation on an octopus by a Malayan water monitor lizard

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Subjects: Malayan water monitor, *Varanus salvator* (Reptilia: Squamata: Varanidae);
Octopus, unidentified genus and species (Mollusca: Cephalopoda: Octopodidae).

Subjects identified by: Chiok Wen Xuan

Location, date and time: Pulau Ubin, along Jalan Wat Siam; 13 December 2018; 0918 hrs.

Habitat: Mangrove forest. At low tide.

Observer: Chiok Wen Xuan.

Observation: An adult water monitor of approximately 1.5 m total length was spotted thrashing about on the floor of the mangrove forest with an octopus in its mouth. The octopus, still alive, was attaching its tentacles to any surface it could reach, including the monitor lizard (Fig. 1). The predator used its forefeet in an attempt to dismember its prey, but was unsuccessful (Fig. 2). It even hit the octopus against the root buttress of a mangrove tree (genus *Rhizophora*) (Fig. 3). The observer did not stay to determine if the lizard was eventually successful in ingesting the octopus.

Remarks: The Malayan water monitor has been successful in adapting to live in anthropogenised environments in Singapore. There, it is widespread and can be found in various habitats, from parklands to secondary forests and mangroves (Lim & Lim, 1992; Rashid, 2004). This generalist carnivore consumes a wide range of prey, from birds and their eggs, small mammals such as rats, and other reptiles like juvenile crocodiles and snakes. It also scavenges on carrion (Gaulke, 1991; Das, 2010; Fitzsimons & Thomas, 2016), and has been recorded to consume carcasses as large as that of a bearded pig (Fitzsimons & Thomas, 2016). Although *Varanus salvator* is known to have a diverse diet, the featured observation may be the first published record of an individual attempting to feed on a live octopus, which was likely stranded after the tide receded.

References:

- Das, I., 2010. *A Field Guide to the Reptiles of South-east Asia*. New Holland Publishers, United Kingdom. 376 pp.
- Fitzsimons, J. & J. Thomas, 2016. Feeding behavior of an Asian water monitor *Varanus salvator macromaculatus* on a Bornean bearded pig *Sus barbatus barbatus* carcass. *Biawak*. 10 (2): 48-50.
- Gaulke, M., 1991. On the diet of the water monitor, *Varanus salvator*, in the Philippines. *Mertensiella*. 2: 143-153.
- Lim, K. K. P. & F. L. K. Lim, 1992. *A Guide to the Amphibians & Reptiles of Singapore*. Singapore Science Centre. 160 pp.
- Rashid, S. M. A., 2004. *Population Ecology and Management of Water Monitors, Varanus salvator (Laurenti 1768) at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, Singapore*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. 508 pp.



Fig. 1. Octopus attempting pull itself out of the lizard's jaws with its tentacles.



Fig. 2. Lizard attempting to dislodge the tentacles of the octopus from its body.

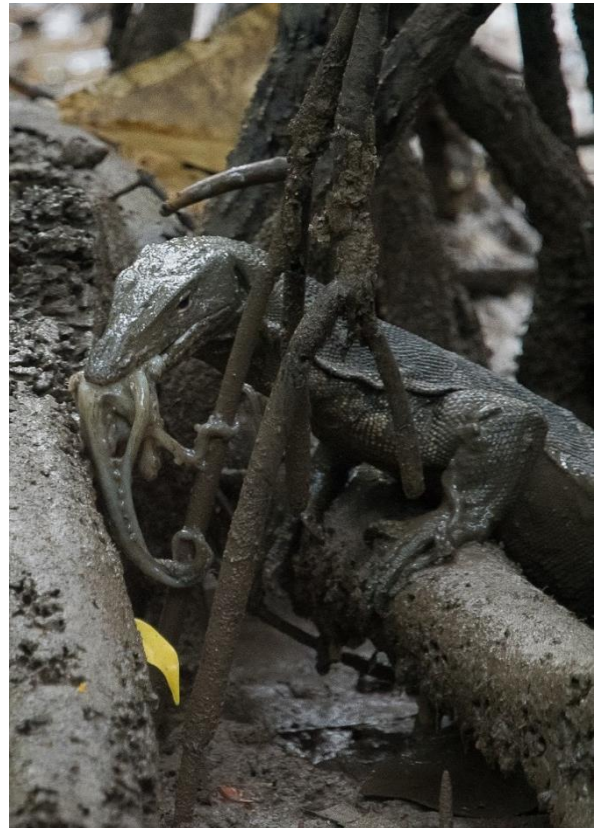


Fig. 3. Lizard slamming octopus against *Rhizophora* root buttress.

Photographs by Chiok Wen Xuan