

Paradise gliding snakes preying on lizards

Tan Swee Hee & Holly Chapman

nhmtansh@nus.edu.sg (Tan), hollycchapman@hotmail.co.uk (Chapman)

Subjects: Paradise gliding snake, *Chrysopelea paradisi* (Reptilia: Squamata: Colubridae);
Spiny-tailed house gecko, *Hemidactylus frenatus* (Reptilia: Squamata: Gekkonidae);
Changeable lizard, *Calotes versicolor* (Reptilia: Squamata: Agamidae).

Subjects identified by: Tan Swee Hee & Holly Chapman.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, two separate locations -

1. Tiong Bahru housing estate, Boon Tiong Road; 10 February 2019; around 1710 hrs.
2. Queenstown, between Margaret Drive and Tanglin Park Connector; 2 May 2019; 1410 hrs.

Habitat: 1. Urban parkland. 2. Housing estate of concrete highrise buildings.

Observers: Tan Swee Hee and many others at location 1. Holly Chapman at location 2.

Observations: Two separate sightings -

1. At Tiong Bahru housing estate, a paradise gliding snake of about 1 m long was first encountered at the base of a coconut tree coiled around the head and anterior body of a changeable lizard which was struggling to escape from the coils (Fig. 1 & 2). The snake was not biting the lizard but seemed distracted (Fig. 3), possibly disturbed by the human onlookers, and also by being in a vulnerable position on the ground. While the coils were slightly loosened, the lizard managed to break free and scuttle up the trunk of the coconut tree. Immediately the snake followed the lizard up the tree but on the opposite side (Fig. 4). The snake intercepted the lizard about 2 m up, bit it and coiled the anterior part of its body around the victim, dragging the lizard sideways to the right. The lizard held on to the tree trunk with the claws of its left hind foot, and the snake had the hind part of its body secured on a raised section of the tree bark. Both animals remained locked in this position on the tree trunk (Fig. 5 & 6). As the observer was unable to stay to follow up on the event, it is not known if the snake had managed to subdue and devour the lizard.
2. At Queenstown, a paradise gliding snake of approximately 80 cm total length was observed eating a gecko (apparently a spiny-tailed house gecko) about a metre off the ground on the trunk of a large rain tree (Fig. 7). It was quite motionless with the gecko's head and anterior body already half ingested for about 30 seconds. After this time and still with the gecko in its mouth, the snake moved swiftly up the tree and out of the observer's sight.

Remarks: The paradise gliding snake is a common reptile in Singapore's urban environment (Baker & Lim, 2012) and sometimes enters houses (see Tan, 2014). It feeds largely on lizards, as well as on birds and small bats (Chan & D'Rozario, 2013). Previous to the present record from Queenstown, an example was also documented eating a spiny-tailed house gecko (Morgany, 2018).

In the observation at Tiong Bahru, the snake's seeming ability to intercept a fleeing lizard up a tree apparently without continuously having the prey in its sight is interesting. It is possible that the snake is able to track and pin-point the location of its prey by scent. This is also demonstrated by its forest-dwelling close relative, the twin-barred gliding snake (*Chrysopelea pelias*) (see Toh, 2019). This sighting also shows that the paradise gliding snake uses constriction to restrain and possibly suffocate larger prey.



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.

Fig. 1-6. Sequence of events showing a paradise gliding snake attacking a changeable lizard at Tiong Bahru housing estate. Photographs by Tan Swee Hee



Fig. 7. A paradise gliding snake eating a gecko at Queenstown. Photograph by Holly Chapman

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.
- Chan K. W. & V. D’Rozario, 2013. Paradise gliding snake preying on bamboo bat. *Singapore Biodiversity Records*. 2013: 52-58.
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- Tan, T. H. T., 2014. Paradise gliding snake in an apartment at Hillview. *Singapore Biodiversity Records*. 2014: 317.
- Toh W. Y., 2019. Twin-barred gliding snake hunting spotted house gecko. *Singapore Biodiversity Records*. 2019: 52-53.