

Brown tree skink and white-bellied rat snake at Thomson Nature Park

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Subjects: Brown tree skink, *Dasia grisea* (Reptilia: Squamata: Scincidae);
White-bellied rat snake, *Ptyas fusca* (Reptilia: Squamata: Colubridae).

Subjects identified by: Nick Baker.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Thomson Nature Park; 24 October 2019; 1800 & 1838 hrs.

Habitat: Secondary forest.

Observer: Nick Baker.

Observations: The two featured reptiles were observed on the same day.

- 1) A brown tree skink of about 10 cm snout-vent length (Fig. 1) was photographed at 1838 hrs on a tree next to a trail, which has large hollows into which the skink quickly retreated when people came near. A brown tree skink was first observed on the tree on 14 October 2019 at eye level. During three subsequent visits, a brown tree skink was seen on the same tree at different times of the day. It is assumed that the sightings are of the same individual.



Fig. 1. In-situ dorso-lateral view of head and anterior body of brown tree skink in tree hole. Photograph by Nick Baker



Fig. 2. In-situ lateral view of head and anterior body of white-bellied rat snake. Photograph by Nick Baker

- 2) A white-bellied rat snake with an estimated total length of 2 m was heard moving among dry leaf litter at the edge of a broad path at 1800 hrs. Upon becoming aware of the observer, the snake raised the anterior part of its body and remained motionless for about one minute, which gave the observer an opportunity to photograph it (Fig. 2). It then moved away into the forest. While slithering through the leaf litter, the diagnostic black stripe along the rear part of the snake's flanks was observed.

Remarks: In Singapore, the brown tree skink and the white-bellied rat snake are known from the Bukit Timah and Central Catchment Nature Reserves (Baker & Lim, 2012: 84, 107), and are locally regarded as 'endangered' (Davison et al., 2008: 265). Both species are also present at Windsor Nature Park. Brown tree skinks were reported there in 2011 (Groenewoud, 2014). White-bellied rat snakes were sighted several times at Windsor Nature Park. The latest was a large individual observed by the author on 5 November 2019.

A few years before, on 4 January 2014, the author had observed a brown tree skink in a hollow tree along Old Upper Thomson Road at the eastern boundary of the Central Catchment Nature Reserve. This location is adjacent to the Thomson Nature Park.

White-bellied rat snakes are usually encountered along forest streams (Baker & Lim, 2012: 107), but the featured sighting was on a hillside, around 50 m from the nearest waterway. Three white-bellied rat snake roadkills along Old Upper Thomson Road, the western boundary of Thomson Nature Park, were retrieved and deposited at the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum at the National University of Singapore, where they have been preserved and catalogued with a ZRC prefix. The first (ZRC 2.4996) was obtained in 2001, the second (ZRC 2.5433) was from 2002. The third (ZRC 2.6994) was retrieved by the author in 2012. The author has conducted numerous ad-hoc surveys along Old Upper Thomson Road between 2013 and 2015, but did not encounter any more roadkill of this species there.

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.
- Davison, G. W. H., P. K. L. Ng & H. C. Ho (eds.), 2008. *The Singapore Red Data Book. Threatened Plants & Animals of Singapore*. Second edition. Nature Society (Singapore). viii + 285 pp.
- Groenewoud, D., 2014. Brown tree skinks at MacRitchie forest. *Singapore Biodiversity Records*. 2014: 227-228.