

Biodiversity Record: Observations of two red-tailed racers at Thomson Nature Park

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Subjects: Red-tailed racer, *Gonyosoma oxycephalum* (Reptilia: Squamata: Colubridae).

Subjects identified by: Seah Jun Wei Benjamin.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Thomson Nature Park; 10 May 2024 around 0938 hrs and 11 May 2024 at around 0850 hrs.

Habitat: On a *Ficus* tree in secondary forest.

Observer: Seah Jun Wei Benjamin.

Observations: On 10 May 2024 around 0938 hrs, a seemingly agitated red-crowned barbet (*Psilopogon rafflesii*, Aves: Piciformes: Megalaimidae) emitting a loud continuous call was observed hopping around in the canopy of a fig tree (Fig. 1). The cause of its distress seemed to be two red-tailed racers coiled on different branches nearby, about 5 m from the ground. The two snakes were about 1.5 m apart (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Ventral view of a red-crowned barbet (lower right) mobbing the snakes, one of which is on the top left (Photograph by: Seah Jun Wei Benjamin).

The following morning at around 0850 hrs, two red-tailed racers, presumably the same two snakes from the day before, were observed on the same tree, but in a different location about 4–5 m from the ground. They were much closer to each other compared to the previous day (Fig. 3). The smaller snake was later seen moving away from the larger snake. It was difficult to estimate the sizes of the snakes, but the larger seemed to be at least 180 cm in total length. The two snakes were also mobbed by four slender squirrels (*Sundasciurus tenuis*, Mammalia: Rodentia: Sciuridae).

The snakes could not be found when the observer returned to the site three days later, on 14 May 2024.



Fig. 2. Ventral view of the two red-tailed racers on the same tree on 10 May 2024. The larger individual at the top left, while the smaller one is at the bottom right (Photograph by: Seah Jun Wei Benjamin).

Remarks: The close proximity of the two snakes to each other on the second day (Fig. 3) appears to indicate an impending sexual union. It is possible that the smaller snake, presumably the male, was seeking to mate with the larger individual, presumably the female. However, it is not clear if this was achieved.

A pair of copulating red-tailed racers was documented by White (2020) on a roadside tree outside the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve. They were mobbed by plantain squirrels (*Callosciurus notatus*). The slender squirrel (*Sundasciurus tenuis*) and long-tailed macaque (*Macaca fascicularis*) are also known to mob red-tailed racers (Ng et al., 2016 and present record). The present observation includes a bird, the red-crowned barbet.

In Singapore, the red-tailed racer is listed as a vulnerable species (Figueroa et al., 2023). Its presence in Thomson Nature Park was recorded earlier by Ng (2019).

Literature cited:

- Figueroa A, Low MEY & Lim KKP (2023) Singapore's herpetofauna: updated and annotated checklist, history, conservation, and distribution. *Zootaxa*, 5287: 1–378.
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- Ng S (2019) Red-tailed racer at Thomson Nature Park. *Singapore Biodiversity Records*, 2019: 153.
- White R (2020) An encounter with a pair of mating red-tailed racers. *Singapore Biodiversity Records*, 2020: 106–107.



Fig. 3. Latero-ventral view of the two snakes in close proximity to each other on 11 May 2024 (Photograph by: Seah Jun Wei Benjamin).