

Biodiversity Record: White-crested laughingthrush attacking banded coral snake

Evelyn Shing Min Chong

Email: evelyn_chong@nparks.gov.sg

Recommended citation. Chong ESM (2024) Biodiversity Record: White-crested laughingthrush attacking banded coral snake. Nature in Singapore, 17: e2024078. DOI: 10.26107/NIS-2024-0078

Subjects: White-crested laughingthrush, *Garrulax leucolophus* (Aves: Passeriformes: Leiothrichidae);
Banded Malayan coral snake, *Calliophis intestinalis* (Reptilia: Squamata: Elapidae).

Subjects identified by: Evelyn Shing Min Chong.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Mount Faber Park, Temenggong Road entrance; 23 May 2024; around 1715 hrs.

Habitat: Edge of secondary forest. In cloudy weather.

Observers: Evelyn Shing Min Chong and Zoe Chia.

Observation: A group of four white-crested laughingthrush was noted on the ground at the side of the road. One of the birds was attacking a banded Malayan coral snake no longer than 15 cm in length. It was flinging the snake about and jabbing at it with its bill. The snake writhed about but did not appear to be biting its attacker in retaliation (Figs. 1–6). The observer noted that the snake was no longer moving when she left the scene shortly after. It is not known if the snake was consumed by any of the birds afterwards.

The ten-second video clip, recorded by Evelyn Shing Min Chong, can be viewed at <https://youtube.com/shorts/38Z1n7xJXzs>.

Remarks: The white-crested laughingthrush is native to northeast India, southern China and Indochina. In Singapore, it is a common resident with a population that originates from escaped pet birds. It inhabits secondary forest and scrub where it forages on the ground in parties of four to six individuals (Yong et al., 2017). The species is omnivorous, and its diet is known to consist of insects, fruits, seeds, nectar and the occasional small amphibian and reptile (BIRDA, 2024). Although the outcome of the featured behaviour was not observed, it is possible that the snake was consumed by the bird.

The featured behaviour is interesting because the bird was relentlessly attacking a venomous snake. However, the snake did not seem to put up a fight, probably due to its small size and slow reflexes, but relies on the bird's recognition of its venomous nature. The primary defence *Calliophis intestinalis* employs is flipping over to expose its startling black-and-white banded underside and red tail (see Baker & Lim, 2012), which is supposed to advertise its toxic nature, and thus deter its tormentor from attacking it. Unfortunately for the snake in this case, it did not work on the laughingthrush. *Calliophis intestinalis* is an uncommon but widespread snake in Singapore which occurs in forest as well as in urban environments (Figueroa et al., 2023). Although to be expected, this appears to be the first time the species is recorded at Mount Faber.

Literature cited:

Baker N & Lim KKP (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.

BIRDA (2024) White-crested laughingthrush. [app.birda.org/species-guide/28174/White-crested Laughingthrush](http://app.birda.org/species-guide/28174/White-crested-Laughingthrush). (Accessed 10 July 2024)

Figueroa A, Low MEY & Lim KKP (2023) Singapore's herpetofauna: updated and annotated checklist, history, conservation, and distribution. *Zootaxa*, 5287: 1–378.

Yong DL, Lim KC & Lee TK (2017) A Naturalist's Guide to the Birds of Singapore. 3rd edition. John Beaufoy Publishing, Oxford, England, 176 pp.



Figs. 1-6. Sequence of a white-crested laughing thrush attacking a banded coral snake. The snake is discernible in the pictures by its black-and-white banded underside (Screenshots from video recorded by: Evelyn Shing Min Chong).