

Biodiversity Record: Predation of many-lined sun skink by sunbeam snake

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Subjects: Sunbeam snake, *Xenopeltis unicolor* (Reptilia: Squamata: Xenopeltidae);
Many-lined sun skink, *Eutropis multifasciata* (Reptilia: Squamata: Scincidae).

Subjects identified by: Yon-lu Goh.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Upper Seletar Reservoir Park, 14–15 August 2024 at around 2100–0030 hrs.

Habitat: Edge of freshwater swamp forest, on leaf litter next to a drain. The leaf litter was moist from multiple rain showers earlier in the day.

Observer: Yon-lu Goh.

Observation: At around 2100 hrs, a sunbeam snake of about 90 cm total length was observed actively moving in the leaf litter (Fig. 1). After capturing a few photographs, the observer quickly lost sight of the snake and moved on. At 2230 hrs, the observer checked the area again and found the sunbeam snake about a metre away from its previous location. After snapping a photograph, the observer left the snake alone. The snake was lying still and did not move, its head was buried in the leaf litter (Fig. 2).

At around 2350 hrs, the observer returned to the area to look for the sunbeam snake again. It was resting in the same position as before. While the observer was approaching the snake for a closer look, it suddenly went into a frenzy under the leaf litter. Next, it emerged from the leaf litter with its body tightly coiled around a many-lined sun skink of over 10 cm total length (Fig. 3). The snake had firmly bitten onto the head of the lizard such that its head was not visible. Over the next 40 minutes, the skink continued to struggle and twitch occasionally while the snake maintained a tight coil around its body. At 0030 hrs, the snake began to uncoil around the lizard and slowly worked its way up to the lizard's head to commence swallowing the prey whole (Fig. 4). At 0035 hrs, the snake began to slither away, with the skink's two hind legs and tail protruding from its mouth as it moved (Fig. 5). The observer left the scene at this point.

Remarks: The sunbeam snake is a non-venomous fossorial snake known for its highly iridescent scales. It employs constriction to kill its prey, which consists of rodents, birds, frogs and lizards (Das, 2018). In the featured observation, the skink was still alive and twitching for up to 40 minutes while it was held within the snake's coils. The author believes that the snake began to uncoil only after it had determined that the skink was dead, allowing it to ingest its prey without risk of the latter escaping.

A similar incident involving the same species of predator and prey was recently recorded in Sarawak, Borneo. A sun skink attached with a radio transmitter to track its activity was found eaten by a sunbeam snake (Kumar & Das, 2023).

Literature cited:

Das I (2018) A Naturalist's Guide to the Snakes of Southeast Asia. 2nd edition. John Beaufoy Publishing, United Kingdom, 176 pp.

Kumar T & Das I (2023) Predation on the common sun skink, *Eutropis multifasciata* (Kuhl, 1820), by the sunbeam snake, *Xenopeltis unicolor* (Reinwardt, 1827), in Sarawak, Borneo. Herpetology Notes, 16: 841–843.

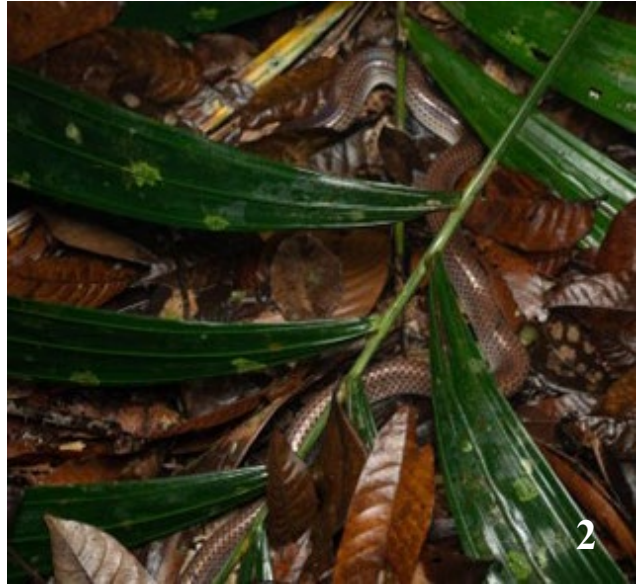


Fig 1. The sunbeam snake when it was first observed moving in the leaf litter.

Fig 2. The second encounter with the sunbeam snake, about a metre away. The head (at top left) is buried in the leaf litter, and the snake was stationary at this spot for a long time.

Fig 3. Sunbeam snake coiled around the many-lined sun skink, right after it emerged from under the leaf litter.

Fig 4. The sunbeam snake loosening its coils around the lizard and beginning to swallow the skink head-first.

Fig 5. The sunbeam snake slithering away with the skink partially swallowed.

(Photographs by: Yon-lu Goh)