

Biodiversity Record: Changeable hawk-eagle with laced woodpecker prey mobbed by greater racket-tailed drongo

Wan Ting Chan* & G. Kenny Png

National Parks Board, Singapore Botanic Gardens, Singapore 259569; Email: wanting2344@gmail.com (*corresponding author)

Recommended citation. Chan WT & Png GK (2025) Biodiversity Record: Changeable hawk-eagle with laced woodpecker prey mobbed by greater racket-tailed drongo. Nature in Singapore, 18: e2025104. DOI: 10.26107/NIS-2025-0104

Subjects: Changeable hawk-eagle, *Nisaetus cirrhatus* (Aves: Accipitriformes: Accipitridae);
Laced woodpecker, *Picus vittatus* (Aves: Piciformes: Picidae);
Greater racket-tailed drongo, *Dicrurus paradiseus* (Aves: Passeriformes: Dicruridae).

Subjects identified by: Wan Ting Chan.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Thomson Nature Park, 2 May 2025; around 0657 hrs

Habitat: Secondary forest.

Observers: Wan Ting Chan, G. Kenny Png, Poh Yee Goh and Primeman Tan. From video images obtained by an arboreal camera trap installed on a tree approximately 13 m off the ground (Fig. 1).

Observation: A changeable hawk-eagle gripping a laced woodpecker with its talons on a tree branch and harassed by a greater racket-tailed drongo was recorded on video at dawn (see <https://youtu.be/O160yM3sfZI>).

The hawk-eagle was perched on a *Ficus variegata* tree branch, about 13 m above the ground. While the drongo emitted persistent alarm calls, the hawk-eagle did not retaliate, but remained alert, scanning its surroundings. The drongo flew around and attempted at least three strikes at the hawk-eagle in a span of one minute. Throughout the mobbing by the drongo, the hawk-eagle maintained its grip on the woodpecker which appeared to be dead (Fig. 2).

Remarks: The images herein presented of a changeable hawk-eagle having successfully captured a laced woodpecker, supports previous observations that birds constitute a significant portion of this raptor's diet (Pande et al., 2018).

The greater racket-tailed drongo's persistent alarm calls and mobbing behavior, even when the potential predator is already occupied with a prey, indicate strong anti-predator defense to protect its territory or warn other potential prey in the area (Caro, 2005; Goodale et al., 2014). This aggressive display may have been intensified by territoriality (Caro, 2005), particularly if the changeable hawk-eagle was close to the drongo's nest.

Thomson Nature Park is classified as a secondary rainforest (Yee et al., 2016) reclaimed from an abandoned village settlement in the late 1980s, and often assumed to possess a lower degree of ecological complexity than primary forests. However, the presence of a top avian predator (changeable hawk-eagle), a prey item (laced woodpecker), and active



Fig. 1. Scale reference of the arboreal camera trap (red circle), installed on a *Ficus variegata* tree around 13 m above ground (Photograph by: Wan Ting Chan).

mobbing behavior (by greater racket-tailed drongo) collectively indicate a biodiverse, healthy functioning forest ecosystem with active trophic linkages between predator-prey and inter-species dynamics (Begon & Townsend, 2020).



Fig. 2. Two still images from the camera trap showing a greater racket-tailed drongo (in red circle) mobbing a changeable hawk-eagle with a laced woodpecker (in yellow circle) in its talons. (Photographs by: National Parks Board)

Literature cited:

Begon M & Townsend CR (2020) *Ecology: From Individuals to Ecosystems*. 5th edition. John Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, 864 pp.

Caro TM (2005) *Antipredator Defenses in Birds and Mammals*. University Chicago Press, Chicago, 592 pp.

Goodale E, Ratnayake CP & Kotagama SW (2014) Vocal mimicry of alarm-associated sounds by a drongo elicits flee and mobbing responses from other species that participate in mixed-species bird flocks. *Ethology*, 120(3): 266–274.

Pande S, Yosef R, Morelli F, Pawar R & Mone R (2018) Diet and habitat affinities in six raptor species in India. *Avian Research*, 9(1): 1–9.

Yee AT, Chong KY & Neo L (2016) Updating the classification system for the secondary forests of Singapore. *Raffles Bulletin of Zoology*, 32: 11–21.