

Malayan Water Monitor *Varanus salvator* scavenging a dead heron at Bangkok, Thailand

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Observer: Choo Yan Ru.
Photographs by: Choo Yan Ru.
Subject identified by: Choo Yan Ru.

Location: Mongkhut's University of Technology Thonburi, Bangkhuntian campus, Bangkok, Thailand.
Elevation: 20 metres
Habitat: Urban, drainage canal.
Date and time: 10 July 2017, 07:15 hrs.

Identity of subject: Malayan Water Monitor, *Varanus salvator* (Reptilia: Squamata: Varanidae).

Description of record: A dead heron of unknown species was observed floating in a drainage canal at 07:15 hrs (Fig. 1). At 07:26 hrs a water monitor (with an estimated total length of 1.2 metres) was observed along the pavement, and it subsequently entered the canal. At 07:31 hrs it began swimming rapidly towards the heron (Fig. 2), stopping abruptly when it was 1 metre away from the heron. It dived below the water, then resurfaced next to the heron carcass and briefly dragged it underwater (Fig. 3). The monitor then released its hold on the heron and inspected the body from the bank (Fig. 4).



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.

Subsequently, it seized the heron again and swam towards the opposite bank (Fig. 5), climbed into some bushes (Figs. 6 and 7) and began tearing at the heron. At 07:41 hrs, it re-emerged from the bushes having apparently swallowed most of the bird: it then spent the rest of the remaining observed time attempting to remove the longer feathers (Fig. 8). The observer left the scene at 07:46 hrs before the feathers were removed.



Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.



Fig. 7.



Fig. 8.

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Remarks: *Varanus salvator* is an aquatic species of monitor which occurs in coastal habitats, such as mangrove, as well as freshwater habitats, such as rivers and wetlands, in many parts of Southeast Asia. It also occurs in highly urban settings, where it ventures into drainage canals. Its diet is varied and comprises invertebrates, such as crabs and insects, and vertebrates such as fish, freshwater turtles, birds and their eggs, crocodiles, sea turtles, lizards and rats, in addition to carrion (Das, 2010). It plays a role in removing carrion from urban environments: in Singapore it has been observed consuming a dead freshwater terrapin and a dead fish (N. Baker, pers. comm.).

References:

Das, I. (2010). *A Field Guide to the Reptiles of South-east Asia*. New Holland Publishers (UK) Ltd. 376 pp.