

A case of White-breasted kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) preying on a gecko (*Hemidactylus aquilonius*)

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The White-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* (Linnaeus, 1758) is distributed across India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Egypt and Iraq (Ali & Ripley, 1983). Though a common bird in its range of distribution, studies on the species is sparse and limited to casual observation (Sen, 1994; Mukherjee, 1975; Yahya & Yasmin, 1991; Oommen & Andrews, 1996; Srinivasalu, 2004; Asokan, *et al.*, 2009). The diet of the bird mostly consists of arthropod insects (Asokan, *et al.*, 2009) also the bird is known to feed on vertebrates such as fishes, frogs, lizards, snakes, rodents and even small birds (Ali & Ripley, 1983; Sen, 1944; Purandare, 2008; Roberts & Priddy, 1965; Tehsin, 1989). However, it is often seen that the diet of an organism is affected by the land use adjacent to its breeding location. Food habit data is usually useful in enhancing our understanding of prey use among habitat type within the area, monitoring potential exposure to contaminants in restored populations and developing future management and conservation strategies (Carter, *et al.*, 2003). These measures are even more important in an urban setup because of rapid rate of habitat degradation. In this note we report a case of predation of *Hemidactylus aquilonius*, Zug & McMahan, 2007 by *Halcyon smyrnensis*.

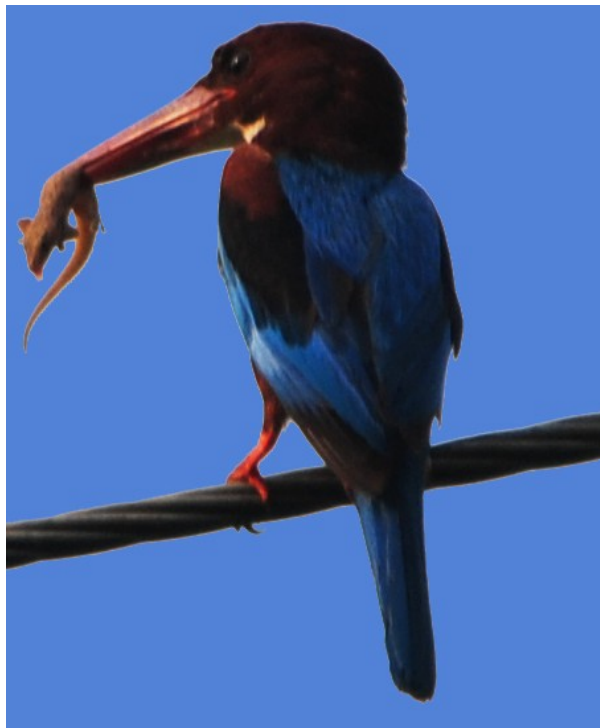


Figure 1. White-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* preying on *Hemidactylus aquilonius* at Sarania hills of Guwahati, Assam, India (Photo: Jayaditya Purkayastha).

On July 10th, 2012 as a part of our ongoing herpetofaunal survey of Assam, we visited Sarania Reserve forest. The incidence took place at around 17:30 hours. When we approached the bird it was seen perched on an electric cable. At the next instance, we observed it lunging towards a thatched hut below, from where it grabbed the gecko. It then flew back to the electric cable and started banging the head of the gecko on the cable with violent jerk of its head. This was repeated for 6 times. Through the view finder of the Nikon D3000 camera fitted with tele lens (Nikkor 55-300mm), it was observed that the tongue of the gecko was sticking out (see Figure 1) indicating that the gecko was either dead or unconscious. The bird then lifted its neck up with its jaw wide open and gulped the gecko entirely. The whole event lasted for 4 minutes, after which the bird was seen to fly away.

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