

Predation by Philippine Rat Snake *Coelognathus philippinus* on Common House Gecko *Hemidactylus frenatus* on Palawan Island, Philippines

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Photograph by: Wilhelm Joshua S. Tan.

Subjects identified by: Wilhelm Joshua S. Tan, Emerson Y. Sy.

Location: Palawan Island, Barangay Maningning, Puerto Princesa City, Palawan Province, Philippines.

Elevation: 18 metres ASL.

Habitat: Hotel garden adjacent to an empty lot in a highly urbanized area.

Date and time: 15 April 2022, 18:39 hrs.

Identity of subjects:

- (i) Philippine Rat Snake, *Coelognathus philippinus* (Reptilia: Squamata (Serpentes): Colubridae).
- (ii) Common House Gecko, *Hemidactylus frenatus* (Reptilia: Squamata (Sauria): Gekkonidae).

Description of record:

A juvenile Philippine Rat Snake was observed slithering on the ground in the garden of a hotel; a nuptial flight of termites was happening at that time. The termites had congregated near a light bulb close to the ground, and frogs and geckos started to feed on them.

Later, the snake was observed biting the posterior part of the gecko's body (Fig. 1). The snake did not release its bite to reorient the gecko head first, but instead started to swallow its prey from the posterior end. It took approximately seven minutes before the gecko was completely swallowed.

Remarks:

The snake was identified as a juvenile *Coelognathus philippinus* based on (i) a series of black-edged white bars on the side of its body, (ii) a black postocular stripe, and (iii) a black diagonal stripe starting from the posterior temporal scale (Taylor, 1922; Weinell et al., 2019).

The gecko was identified as *Hemidactylus frenatus* based on (i) its size, (ii) its head not distinctly broader than its body, and (iii) its greyish-brown dorsal colour (Brown & Alcalá, 1978).



Fig. 1.

W.J.S. Tan

Coelognathus philippinus is an endemic colubrid snake occurring on the islands of Balabac, Bongao, Busuanga, Calait, Culion, Palawan, Sanga-Sanga, Sibutu, and Tawi-Tawi (Sy, 2023). It was once hypothesized that it mainly fed on birds and small rodents, and not reptiles or amphibians (Taylor, 1922), however a failed attempt to predate upon a Tokay Gecko (*Gekko gekko*) was reported some years ago on Palawan Island (Huang et al, 2008).

Hemidactylus frenatus is a gekkonid lizard found throughout the Philippines and commonly observed in disturbed habitats and inside houses (Taylor, 1922). The Common House Gecko prey could have been feeding on termites near the ground when the snake attacked it. This is the first report of a successful predation on a gecko by the Philippine Rat Snake.

References:

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