

Biodiversity Record: Predation of a blue-spotted fantail ray by an octopus

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Subjects: Octopus, *Octopus* sp. (Mollusca: Cephalopoda: Octopodidae);
Blue-spotted fantail ray, *Taeniura lymma* (Elasmobranchii: Myliobatiformes: Dasyatidae).

Subjects identified by: Marcus F. C. Ng.

Location, date and time: Singapore Strait, Pulau Hantu; 19 May 2022; 0745 hrs.

Habitat: Marine. Intertidal. Outer edge of fringing reef flat in water of about 20 to 30 cm depth.

Observers: Prashant S. and Marcus F. C. Ng.

Observation: Two octopuses were observed on the reef flat beyond the seawall. One individual, with head length of around 8 cm, appeared to be in pursuit of the other, markedly larger, brown individual. The former, believed to be a male, exhibited dark and pale stripes along half of its body, which may be courtship attire. The larger brown individual darted under a rock (about 40 cm in diameter) and went out of sight. The striped individual then ceased its pursuit and rested on a rock next to the other, while maintaining its colour pattern. After about a minute, the larger individual emerged, with a small blue-spotted fantail ray (estimated length 15 cm) in its arms (Fig. 1). The fish was visibly struggling but appeared to be securely grasped by the larger octopus, which swam towards the outer reef edge. The striped individual then followed the brown individual with its prey into deeper water (Fig. 2). The entire video, recorded by Prashant S., can be viewed at <https://youtube.com/shorts/mdQ2YxheuB4?feature=share>.

Remarks: Octopuses are hunters that are well-equipped with long and flexible probing arms lined with suckers, and strong beaks with paralyzing saliva. They feed on a variety of animals such as shellfish, crabs and fish. One large species has been known to tackle and eat sharks (Norman, 2000: 235). The featured observation is unusual in that the prey is a stingray, which despite bearing a serrated spine on its tail, seemed thoroughly subdued and unable to defend itself. This appears to be the first record in Singapore waters of an octopus capturing a stingray. The act seems to be opportunistic and does not appear to be part of a courtship ritual despite the captor being followed by another octopus with presumably amorous intent throughout the duration of the video.

The featured octopuses appear to be conspecific with a supposed mating pair observed at Pulau Subar Laut in December 2014 (Yeo, 2015). The presumed males exhibit similar black stripes on their head and limbs.

Literature cited:

Norman M (2000) Cephalopods. A World Guide. Conch Books & IKAN, 318 pp.

Yeo RKH (2015) A pair of mating octopuses. Singapore Biodiversity Records, 2015: 46.



Fig. 1. Striped octopus (middle right) watches as brown octopus with stingray (indicated with arrow) in its arms glided past towards the left. (Screen grab from video by Prashant S.)



Fig. 2. Striped octopus (lower right) in pursuit of brown octopus with stingray (indicated with arrow) as it swam towards the outer reef edge. (Screen grab from video by Prashant S.)