



# Predation on a Common Wolfsnake, *Lycodon aulicus* (Colubridae), by an Indian Roller, *Coracias benghalensis* (Coraciidae), in the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve, Tamil Nadu, India

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Photographs by the senior author.

The Common Wolfsnake (*Lycodon aulicus*), which is widely distributed across southern Asia, is active at night and often forages among rocks and on walls and other rough surfaces in which holes and crevices are used as diurnal refugia (Whitaker and Captain 2004). Adults grow to a maximum length of about 92 cm (Vyas and Patel 1995).

The Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*) ranges from western Asia across the entire Indian Subcontinent (BirdLife International 2016). Indian Rollers prey primarily on small insects, mostly on the ground and particularly during evening hours, but also will capture flying insects (Ali and Ripley 2001; Sivakumaran and Thiyagesan 2003; Asokan et al. 2009).

On the morning of 17 March 2019, while tracking radio-tagged Indian Pythons (*Python molurus*) in the Mangalapatti Beat of the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (STR) in Tamil Nadu, India (11.581687°N, 76.906151°E), we encountered an Indian Roller feeding on a snake. The STR is part of the Segur Plateau (elev. 209–1,950 m asl) at the confluence of the Western and Eastern Ghats.

At 1008 h, the Indian Roller emerged from thorny roadside scrub comprised mostly of invasive Mesquite (*Prosopis*

*juliflora*) and native Bush Plum (*Caraiassa spinarum*), picked up its prey, and landed on the unpaved road (Fig. 1). The snake struggled, constricted the beak of the roller, and tried to



Fig. 1. An Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*) had captured a Common Wolfsnake (*Lycodon aulicus*) before landing on the road.



Fig. 2. A Common Wolfsnake (*Lycodon aulicus*) struggling to escape from an Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*).



**Fig. 3.** When the Common Wolfsnake (*Lycodon aulicus*) ceased moving, the Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*) swallowed it before flying away.

bite the bird (Fig. 2). The roller pecked the snake and jumped on it multiple times. Finally, as the snake's movements ceased, the roller swallowed it (Fig. 3) and flew away. This entire episode lasted just 7 min. We identified the approximately 20-cm long prey as a Common Wolfsnake by studying the photographs taken during the feeding event.

Biddulph (1937) reported an Indian Roller eating an unidentified snake and Soud et al. (2010) described a Common Wolfsnake taken by a White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) in a forested area on the Assam University campus. This, however, is the first record of an Indian Roller feeding on a Common Wolfsnake.

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