



# Cannibalism in the Common House Gecko, *Hemidactylus cf. frenatus* Duméril and Bibron 1836 (Reptilia: Gekkonidae), from Tamil Nadu, India.

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House geckos of the genus *Hemidactylus* are ubiquitous throughout the tropics and are known to thrive in human settlements (Vanderduys and Kutt 2013). The Common House Gecko, *Hemidactylus frenatus*, is native to the Indo-Australian Archipelago, and southern and Southeast Asia (Wogan et al. 2021). However, due to unsupervised anthropogenic introductions outside of their native range, they have become one of the most successful invasive species, outcompeting and often causing the decline of native geckos (Agarwal et al. 2021; Griffing et al. 2022). *Hemidactylus* geckos are primarily insectivores, whose diet mainly comprises dipterans, lepidopterans, coleopterans, hemipterans and hymenopterans (Díaz Pérez et al. 2012; Tkaczenko et al. 2014). However, a few studies have reported that these geckos are generalist and opportunistic feeders. They usually avoid vicious insects and occasionally exhibit oophagy and even cannibalism (Polis and Myers 1985; Bolger and Case 1992; Kusuminda et al. 2013; Alemán and Sunyer 2015). Brown et al. (2017) concluded that the natural diet of *H. frenatus* is diverse and varies geographically. Polis and Myers (1985) reported that cannibalism could be an opportunistic response to the combination of high conspecific densities and starvation, and could readily influence competitive interactions among reptiles and amphibians. Although there is very minimal documentation of cannibalism in geckos, it has been recorded in invasive populations of *H. frenatus* (Díaz Pérez et al. 2012). Herein, we describe an instance of cannibalism in *Hemidactylus cf. frenatus*, a first report from India.

The following observation was made at the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (11.0928260N, 76.7843990E) in Coimbatore, India. At approximately 2120 h on 29 January 2022, we observed a mature *Hemidactylus cf. frenatus* (SVL approximately 5 cm) preying on a juvenile conspecific (SVL approximately 2 cm). Initially, we heard a

high-pitched chirp, and found the adult gecko near a tube-light on the wall of our hostel room. The gecko had a firm grasp on the forearm of the juvenile gecko, as pictured in the image (Fig. 1). The juvenile remained motionless while the adult gecko continued to adjust and tighten its grip. The adult gecko swallowed the juvenile gradually. The ingestion was completed at 2123 h. We observed the predating gecko in the same position until 2136 h, after which it disappeared through a crevice in the wall.



**Fig. 1.** An adult *Hemidactylus cf. frenatus* preying upon a juvenile conspecific. Photograph by Yashaswini Narayanappa.

Cannibalism in *H. frenatus* has been previously reported in invasive populations, mainly by analyzing stomach contents in laboratory conditions or in captivity (Galina-Tessaro et al. 1999; Perez et al. 2012; Cogger et al. 1983). However, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first account of cannibalism by *Hemidactylus cf. frenatus* in its native range, from India.

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