



# Cannibalism by a Peninsular Rock Agama (*Psammophilus dorsalis*) in Tamil Nadu, India

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The Peninsular Rock Agama, *Psammophilus dorsalis* (Gray 1831) (Agamidae), is widely distributed in rocky areas of the Indian Peninsula at elevations to 1,829 m asl (Daniel 2002). Adults exhibit male-biased sexual size dimorphism and are sexually dichromatic, with brighter males, especially during the breeding season, and females and juveniles more cryptic (Smith 1935). Peninsular Rock Agamas feed primarily on arthropods, especially ants (Balakrishna et al. 2016), but individuals have been reported feeding on a lizard (*Hemidactylus treutleri*) (Sreekar et al. 2010) and a juvenile Black Rat (*Rattus rattus*) (Balakrishna 2014).

During a herpetofaunal survey in Pakkasuran Hill (11.316278, 76.837056) near Coonoor, Nilgiris Forest Division, Tamil Nadu, India, on 11 October 2018, I observed an adult female *P. dorsalis* holding a juvenile by its head. The female attempted to ingest the juvenile (Fig. 1) but abruptly released it and retreated into a rocky crevice when approached by a male. The juvenile was motionless and had died due to the severe bite to its head (Fig. 1).

Lizards generally are considered opportunistic feeders (Parker and Pianka 1975) and diets can be influenced by factors that include hunting behavior, environmental stress (Pianka 1966), and food availability (Donihue et al. 2015). Cannibalism is not a rare phenomenon (Polis 1981), has been observed in a number of lizard species, and may vary with

the degree of intraspecific lizard densities (Brock et al. 2014). In the case described herein, cannibalism might have been facilitated by high population density (Fox 1975; Polis 1981; García-Márquez et al. 1999) and frequencies of encounters between conspecifics (Polis and Myers 1985).

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**Figure 1.** An adult female Peninsular Rock Agama (*Psammophilus dorsalis*) preying on a juvenile conspecific (left) and the dead juvenile after the incident (right). Photographs by Amirtha Balan Raveendran.

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