



Scavenging Behavior by a Small-scaled Spiny-tailed Lizard (*Uromastyx aegyptia microlepis*) in Kuwait

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Scavenging, the consumption of dead or decaying organic matter, is a widespread and ecologically significant behavior observed across diverse animal taxa; it facilitates nutrient cycling, reduces disease transmission, and introduces important energy pathways within food webs, often rivaling or exceeding predation in ecological impact (DeVault et al. 2003; Wilson and Wolkovich 2011). Particularly in arid and other extreme environments, scavenging is an important behavioral adaptation that enables species to cope with fluctuations in food availability (Amor et al. 2010).

The Small-scaled Spiny-tailed Lizard, *Uromastyx aegyptia microlepis* (Arnold 1980), is native to parts of the Middle East and Arabian Peninsula, including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and neighboring nations in the region (Wilms et al. 2009). Although species in the genus are primarily herbivorous (Herrel and De Vree 2009), feeding on desert shrubs, halophytes, and ephemeral plants (Al-Hamzi 2001; Cunningham 2001), several studies have documented rare cases of omnivory and scavenging behavior in these lizards.

Small amounts of insect remains, comprising as much as 15% of stomach contents, were detected in species such as the North African Spiny-tailed Lizard, *Uromastyx acanthinura* (Kechnebbou et al. 2019), the Moroccan Spiny-tailed Lizard, *Uromastyx nigriventris* (Highfield and Slimani 1998; Bendami et al. 2018), and a juvenile Egyptian Spiny-tailed Lizard, *Uromastyx aegyptia* (Kevork and Al-Uthman 1972). The Small-scaled Spiny-tailed Lizard, *Uromastyx aegyptia microlepis*, is known to consume various invertebrates, including locusts (Brown 1982), tenebrionid beetles (Cunningham 2000, 2001; Castilla et al. 2011), Lepidoptera, Hymenoptera, and even spider webs (Castilla et al. 2011). Cunningham (2001) also reported the presence of feathers in three fecal pellets of *U. a. microlepis*, and Castilla et al. (2011) documented mammalian bone fragments, shed skin, and unidentified lizard skin in fecal samples, suggest-

ing scavenging of vertebrate remains, likely from roadkills, since the samples that contained most vertebrate remains were collected close to a main road. However, to the best of our knowledge, no well-documented cases of saurophagial scavenging have been documented for any species of *Uromastyx*. We herein report an observation of a Small-scaled Spiny-tailed Lizard scavenging a dead Slevin's Sand Gecko (*Stenodactylus slevini*) in nature.

At 0953 h, during a field survey on 27 April 2025 in the Al-Suqaiyah region of northwestern Kuwait (29.69866, 47.20384; elev. ~160 masl), we encountered a juvenile *U. a. microlepis* consuming a dead *S. slevini* (Fig. 1). The juvenile was found holding a part of the gecko's skin in its mouth,



Figure 1. Juvenile Small-scaled Spiny-tailed Lizard, *Uromastyx aegyptia microlepis*, with a carcass of a Slevin's Sand Gecko, *Stenodactylus slevini*, in its mouth. Photo by Mariam Almulla. This photograph has been deposited in the Reptiles & Amphibians Digital Repository at the University of Kansas Biodiversity Institute (RAJ 00019–00020). The identity of the *Uromastyx* was confirmed by Thomas Wilms (independent researcher, Germany) and that of the *Stenodactylus* by Bernd-Michael Zwanzig (independent researcher, Germany).

apparently in an effort to detach it from the rest of the body. The encounter lasted only a few seconds, after which the spiny-tailed lizard dropped the gecko carcass and retreated to its burrow. Since *S. slevini* is nocturnally active, it likely was killed by another animal or run over by a vehicle earlier that night before being found by the juvenile *U. a. microlepis* the next morning. This observation appears to reflect Optimal Foraging Theory, whereby scavenging may enhance survival by enabling animals to take advantage of unconventional but accessible and energetically favorable resources in unpredictable and harsh environments (e.g., Barrette et al. 2010).

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