



Predation on a Himalayan Ground Skink (*Ablepharus himalayanus*) by a Stoat (*Mustela erminea*) in Pakistan

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The Himalayan Ground Skink, *Ablepharus himalayanus* (Günther 1864), is a diurnally active lizard associated with moist grasslands and watercourses at elevations of 1,300–4,600 m, and distributed across Bangladesh, China, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Turkmenistan (Shestopal et al. 2021; Uetz et al. 2026; Weng et al. 2021). In Pakistan, the species occurs along the margins of alpine lakes and streams at elevations to ~3,000 m asl as well as at lower elevations in degraded forests and sub-tropical pine and semi-evergreen forests, where it is most abundant in vegetation along rivers (Shestopal et al. 2021).

Native populations of Stoats (*Mustela erminea* Linnaeus 1758) are distributed across northern regions of both Eastern and Western Hemispheres, where they occupy a broad range of habitats, including forest edges, scrublands, alpine meadows, marshes, riparian woodlands, hedgerows, and riverbanks (McDonald et al. 1998; Dawson et al. 2014; Reid et al. 2016). Although *M. erminea* is considered a specialist predator of small mammals, it occasionally consumes fruits, eggs, earthworms, insects, and birds (Reid et al. 2016).

At 1600 h on 17 August 2025, during a herpetofaunal survey at Saif-Ul-Maluk Lake, District Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan (34.87612, 73.68947), we observed a juvenile *Mustela erminea* with an *A. himalayanus* in its mouth (Fig. 1). The Stoat repeatedly bit and chewed the skink before ingesting it, with the entire predation event lasting ~5 min. Surrounding habitat consisted of alpine pasture with grasses.

Literature Cited

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Figure 1. A juvenile Stoat (*Mustela erminea*) with a Himalayan Ground Skink (*Ablepharus himalayanus*) at Saif-Ul-Maluk Lake, District Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan. Photograph by Abdul Hadi. The photograph has been deposited in the Reptiles & Amphibians Digital Repository of the University of Kansas Biodiversity Institute (RAJ 00017).

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