

A case of predation on *Natrix tessellata*
by the Smyrna kingfisher

(Reptilia: Serpentes: Colubridae)

As a typical representative of the subfamily Daceloninae or forest kingfishers, the Smyrna kingfisher, *Halcyon smyrnensis*, is well adapted to a life in dry biotopes, far away from any water source. At such places its food consists mainly of large insects (especially mole crickets, grasshoppers and beetles), reptiles (lizards and skinks), small mammals (voles and mice) and even small birds (MEINERTZHAGEN 1954; INBAR 1975; TCHERNOV in litt.). However, one may encounter it also near streams, lakes and fishponds. In such wet biotopes this kingfisher is hunting for fish, frogs and crabs.

During a visit to the Hulah Nature Reserve, Israel, on 7 May 1980 we could register an additional prey species: the Diced water snake, *Natrix tessellata* (LAURENTI, 1768). From the so-called "Swinging"-tower our attention was attracted by a Smyrna kingfisher sitting on an overhanging branch with a long, slender object in its bill. A better view through five pairs of binoculars turned this object into an already dead, adult *Natrix tessellata*, a species quite regularly observed in the Hulah swamps. Compared to the body size of the kingfisher, the snake must have been in the range of 60 to 70 cm. We were able to watch the bird for about 1 to 2 minutes before it disappeared into the underbrush of nearby trees. In the same area the nest opening of a Smyrna kingfisher had been located the previous day.

According to our knowledge this seems to be the first record of a Smyrna kingfisher preying on a snake. Further observations has to show whether it is regularly feeding on snakes or merely adding one now and then to its diet.

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Im Hulah-Naturreservat in Israel konnte ein Braunliest (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) beobachtet werden, der eine Würfelnatter (*Natrix tessellata*) erbeutet hatte. Die Nahrung dieses Vertreters der Eißvögel ist im allgemeinen recht vielgestaltig, doch war das Ergreifen von Schlangen bislang nicht bekannt geworden.

References

- INBAR, R. (1975): The birds of Israel, 1: 1-319. 2nd Ed. Tel-Aviv (in Hebrew).
MEINERTZHAGEN, R. (1954): Birds of Arabia. — 624 S. Edinburgh, London.

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