

NOTEBOOK

The endangered Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush *Myophonus blighi* eats an endangered lizard

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Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush *Myophonus blighi* is a globally threatened bird species (IUCN status Endangered) endemic to Sri Lanka, found mainly between 1,200 m and 2,100 m, where it is confined to densely wooded, ferny ravines and gorges, especially those with a rapid torrent running through them. Its food is reportedly mostly insects, but snails are also considered important and it has been recorded eating reptiles and amphibians including geckos, small *Calotes* or *Ceratophora* lizards and tree frogs (probably *Polypedatus*) (BirdLife International 2001).

Between 09h15 and 10h15 on 29 March 2006 at Riverstone in the Knuckles Forest Region (altitude: 1,385 m) in Matale district in Central province of Sri Lanka (7°24'55"N 80°48'35"E) we watched a mature male Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush foraging on the ground. The temperature at that time was 23°C, the humidity 79%, the weather cloudy. First the bird hopped slowly towards us up to c.1 m

distance. Then it jumped over a small dead stem lying on the ground and caught a mature male Sri Lankan Leaf-nosed Lizard *Ceratophora tennenti* (Plate 2) sitting on the bole of a small Keena tree *Calophyllum walkeri*. The bird caught the prey by its neck and dashed it twice on the dead stem, but the lizard then escaped and ran about a metre before the bird jumped over and caught it again at the neck. Again the bird dashed the lizard twice, this time on a rock, then took it under a shrub and beat it a third time on another rock. The first two dashes using the rock were done slowly, the third one was quicker and so powerful that the lizard was thrown about 60 cm. The bird retrieved it and returned to the rock on which it had just dashed it. After 30 seconds it repeated the same action, and over the course of half an hour it beat the lizard 49 times mainly in groups of three.

After this treatment the bird released the dead prey and rested for about a minute, then caught the lizard by the snout, ventral side upwards, and

Plate 1. Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush *Myophonus blighi*, mature male, March 2006.





Plate 2. Sri Lankan Leaf-nosed Lizard *Ceratothrauda tennenti*, mature male, March 2006.

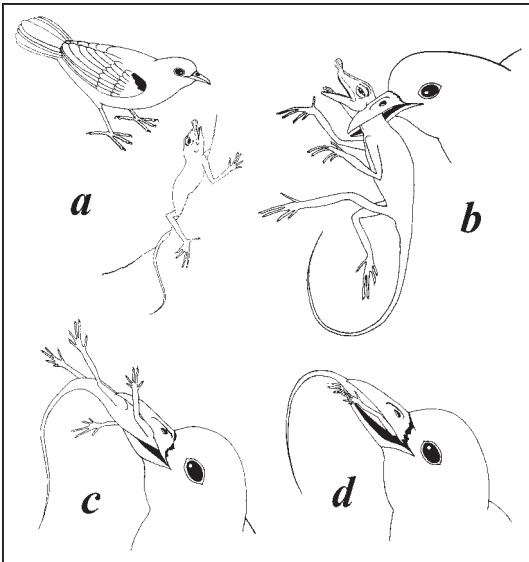


Figure 1. Stages in the catching and eating of a lizard by a Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush *Myophonus blighi*. (a) The bird hops slowly towards the lizard. (b) It catches the lizard at the neck. (c) It starts to swallow the prey head-first. (d) The lizard's tail projects from the bill.

proceeded slowly to swallow it (Figure 1). After a minute, the tail still projecting from the bill, the bird flew up and perched on some low bamboo and finally swallowed the remaining part of the tail. It sat silent for about a minute, then called for about 15 minutes, and went hopping back to the forest. Ironically, the lizard also has the IUCN status Endangered and is only known from the Knuckles Forest range of Sri Lanka (IUCN Sri Lanka 2000, Das & De Silva 2005).

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