



Indian palm squirrel (*Funambulus palmarum*) feeds on spider egg sacs

The Indian palm squirrel, *Funambulus palmarum* (Linnaeus, 1766) (Rodentia: Sciuridae) is known to feed on a wide range of plant items in the wild, including nuts, seeds, fruit, and bark, and will readily consume discarded food around human habitations. The species has been observed to prey opportunistically on insects such as termites and beetles (Phillips 1980). In addition, cannibalistic behaviour has also been recorded (Sadakathulla & Kareem 1995, Edirisinghe & Sudasinghe 2012). Here we report the first observation of *F. palmarum* preying on spider egg sacs.

The observation was made on 3 July 2022 at 10:12 h in a home garden located in Peradeniya (7°15'54.6" N, 80°35'09.5" E), Central Province, Sri Lanka. The observation site contained piles of rubble, occupied by many webs of an orb-web building spider species. The squirrel was observed feeding on something entangled in a spider web, and we realized it was the egg sacs of the spider. The squirrel was clinging to a steel gate facing vertically down, while accessing the egg sac chain strung above the domed web of the spider by using the claws of its forefeet. It took about 10 seconds for the squirrel to consume one egg sac. During the observation period, the squirrel fed on three egg sacs consecutively in the same manner. SKB videographed the observation for 44 seconds using a smartphone and uploaded it to <www.youtube.com/shorts/sknVFTsTAgE>

The spider was later identified as *Cyrtophora cicatrosa* (Stoliczka, 1869), an orb-web building spider commonly known as garden tent-web spider. This species is a sedentary and solitary spider which builds a three-dimensional dome web (Rao & Poyyamoli 2001). The female spiders produce several egg sacs that are beaded like chains that hang at the central part of the upper barrier web during a female's lifetime (Palanichamy 1980).

Spider eggs contain enough energy for the metabolic costs of development, and other post-emergent activities before a spiderling can successfully become self-sustaining by catching its own prey (Anderson 1978). The consumption of spider egg sacs as an energy-rich food item by the squirrel is therefore not entirely unexpected.

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