

Smooth-coated otter eating zebra spiny eel at Marina Reservoir

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Subjects: Smooth-coated otter, *Lutrogale perspicillata* (Mammalia: Carnivora: Mustelidae);
Zebra spiny eel, *Macrogathus zebrinus* (Teleostei: Mastacembelidae).

Subjects identified by: Tan Heok Hui & Meryl Theng.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Marina Reservoir, shore at park area along Republic Avenue opposite Tanjong Rhu; 3 November 2017; 0952 hrs.

Habitat: Artificial impoundment of freshwater in a dammed estuary, surrounded by urban parkland.

Observer: Jeffrey Teo.

Observation: One zebra spiny eel of around 25 cm total length was photographed being tossed about and chewed by a smooth-coated otter near the edge of the reservoir (Fig. 1-4). The otter had bitten the head of the eel (Fig. 2 & 3), most probably killing it in the process. The prey was consumed head-first shortly after (Fig. 4).

Remarks: The zebra spiny eel (Fig. 5) is an ornamental fish that was introduced into Singapore's freshwaters. It has been recorded from the Kranji, Tengeh, Lower Peirce and Lower Seletar Reservoirs (Ng, 2010; Ng & Tan, 2010; Tan et al., 2016) where it seeks refuge in the root mats of marsh plants (Tan Heok Hui, personal observations). The zebra spiny eel is native to the Irrawaddy, Salween and Sittang river basins in Myanmar and can grow to 30 cm in total length (Ng, 2010).

The featured observation represents a new location in Singapore for the zebra spiny eel, and also highlights the use of non-native fish as prey items for the smooth-coated otter in an artificial environment (Theng et al., 2016).



Fig. 1. A zebra spiny eel being tossed about by the otter. Fig. 2. Otter biting the eel in the head.

Photographs by Jeffrey Teo



Fig. 3. Eel being chewed on, and subsequently...



Fig. 4. Swallowed head-first.

Photographs by Jeffrey Teo

References:

- Ng H. H., 2010. The Zebra spiny eel (*Macrogathus zebrinus*) – a non-native species in Singapore (Synbranchiformes: Mastacembelidae). *COSMOS*. 6 (1): 91-93.
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- Theng, M., N. Sivasothi & H. H. Tan, 2016. Diet of the smooth-coated otter *Lutrogale perspicillata* (Geoffroy, 1826) at natural and modified sites in Singapore. *The Raffles Bulletin of Zoology*. 64: 290-301.



Fig. 5. Lateral view of a zebra spiny eel of about 20 cm total length from Lower Seletar Reservoir. Photograph by Tan Heok Hui