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Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus* chick predation by Common Garden Lizard *Calotes versicolor*

Vedant K. Upadhyay: 1/101 Avni Residence, Near Bansal Super Market, Gotri Vasna Road, Vadodara. kartik_upadhyay35@yahoo.com [VU]

Kartik Upadhyay: 1/101 Avni Residence, Near Bansal Super Market, Gotri Vasna Road, Vadodara. kartik_upadhyay35@yahoo.com

Raju Vyas*: Apartment, BPC-Haveli Road, Nr. Splatter Studio, Alakapuri, Vadodara 390007. razoovyas@hotmail.com. *Corresponding author



Photo: Vedant Upadhyay

The Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*) is a small nectar-eating sunbird species belonging to the family Nectariniidae, and it is widely distributed across the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia (Ali & Ripley 1983). This is the most common sunbird species in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) and India (Grimmett *et al.* 1998). This species occurs abundantly in and around the human populations and is found in the urban gardens of Vadodara, Gujarat (Vyas 2021).

On 23 April 2022, the first author [VU] was moving around in the backyard garden near his home at around 12:00 hrs, in the area surrounding his residence at Vadodara, when he heard some alarm calls from birds. He found a Common Garden Lizard (*Calotes versicolor*) approaching an overhanging sunbird nest in the bush. The nest was of a Purple Sunbird and was at a height of about two meters on a Pink Acacia tree (*Rubinia* sp.). Somehow, the lizard was able to catch a chick from the nest and fell on the ground with its prey. The lizard caught the chick's leg. The chick was small; it was not able to fly and so could not escape. The lizard suddenly ran towards a bush and disappeared into the bush with the chick. We presumed later that the lizard might have swallowed the chick whole. The chick was hardly a few days old. Usually, a sunbird selects a safe site and constructs an overhanging nest that predators cannot reach. But here, this garden lizard somehow got to the nest and was able to predate a chick. This is an unusual prey item and a remarkable hunting tactic for a garden lizard.



Photo: Vedant Upadhyay

The Common Garden Lizard is well known to be an ambush predator and is also known for its versatile camouflage abilities. This diurnal and arboreal lizard is widespread and found in anthropogenic habitats, including home gardens,

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parks, plantations, and cities (Somaweera & Somaweera 2009). This species is found in Gujarat too and is seen in anthropogenic habitat, including in Vadodara (Patel & Vyas 2019). The published literature (Sharma 1982, Daniel 1983, Sudasinghe & Somaweera 2015, Deshpande *et al.* 2020) shows that the diet of this lizard consists of invertebrates and vertebrates, including plants matter, too. Plant matter such as leaves, twigs, flowers, seeds, and shoots was found in the gut contents of a lizard (Bhatti *et al.* 1987), as were numerous stone particles in some cases. The garden lizards feed on various types of annelids, insects, myriapods, arachnids, crustaceans, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals of a manageable size (Sudasinghe & Somaweera 2015). Daniel (1983) rarely noted warm-blooded animals in the diet of this lizard. The garden lizard sometimes feeds on bird eggs, nestlings, and adult birds (Daniel 1983). There are records of it feeding on eggs, nestlings, and adults of Baya Weaver (*Ploceus pilippinus*) and the same bird species preying on young lizards as reciprocal predation was noted (Dhindsa & Toor 1983). Paralkar (1995) noted this lizard species feeding on House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). The current observation shows that the chick of a Purple Sunbird is also in the diet of Common Garden Lizard.

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