

Title Predation on *Riopa punctata* (Squamata: Scincidae) by a rock agama *Psammophilus blanfordanus* (Squamata: Agamidae) in Kalahandi, Odisha, India

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During regular patrolling on 26 February 2025, near Lilingpadar (19.69223, 83.13787), Karlapat Wildlife Sanctuary, Kalahandi district, Odisha (Fig 1), we observed a large agamid lizard with a skink in its jaws at 1300 hrs. Upon closer approach, we could clearly see it was a male *Psammophilus blanfordanus* Stoliczka, 1871 feeding on a lygosomine skink, which was later identified from photographs as *Riopa punctata* Linnaeus, 1758. The agamid was seen on a rock by the side of a forest trail, with the head of the skink in its jaw while the tail of the skink was already severed (Fig 2). Upon sensing human disturbance, the agama moved to another site about 2 m away, which had thicker dry foliage around it, and remained still to avoid detection. After about 10 minutes of observation, during which it stayed still but alert, we left the place. Both the species are commonly seen in this region, with *P. blanfordanus* being especially abundant across all habitat types and *R. punctata* being mostly restricted to forested patches.

The genus *Psammophilus* is endemic to peninsular India, with two currently known species — *P. blanfordanus* and *P. dorsalis* — whose exact geographic ranges are not clear and the genus as a whole needs further molecular and taxonomic scrutiny (Pal et al., 2018). The species distributed in Odisha was identified as *P. blanfordanus* in earlier herpetological explorations (Dutta and Acharjyo, 1990). The diet of *Psammophilus* has been considered to consist almost entirely of insects (Daniel, 2002; Radder et al., 2005; Jena et al., 2024). However, Sreekar et al. (2010) reported predation of *Hemidactylus treutleri* by a male *Psammophilus dorsalis* in Rishi Valley, Andhra Pradesh. They hypothesized that males might choose larger prey species given their relatively bigger size in comparison to the female (Smith, 1935; Radder et al., 2006). Aruna et al. (1993) had also reported Mabuyinae skinks in the diet of *P. blanfordanus* in the Eastern Ghats of Vishakhapatnam. Predator-prey interactions play a vital role in shaping evolutionary pressures, thereby shaping overall ecosystem dynamics (Schmitz, 2017). Further studies are therefore necessary to understand how diet preferences are influenced by season, habitat, and sex.

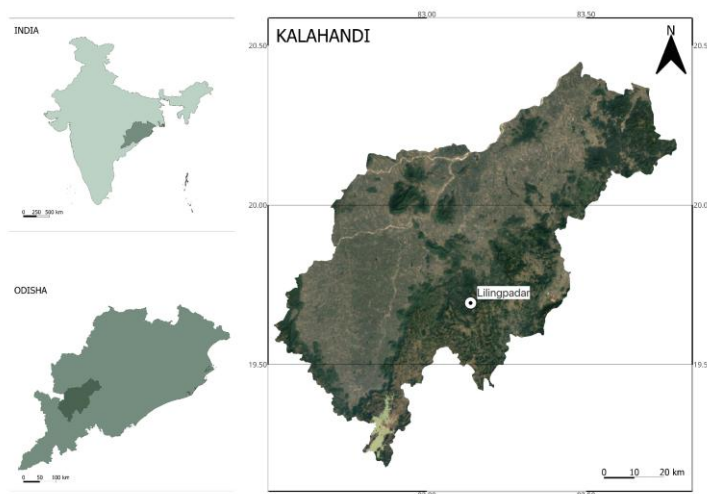


Fig 1: Map of Kalahandi, showing the location of observation.



Fig 2: *Psammophilus blanfordanus* feeding on *Riopa punctata*. Karlapat Wildlife Sanctuary, Kalahandi, Odisha. (Photo by Anurag Mishra)

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