

GEKKONIDAE***Cyrtopodion scabrum* Heyden, 1827****Keeled Rock Gecko****PREDATION**

On 22 July 2009 at 09h00 I observed an adult *Cyrtopodion scabrum* fall prey to a Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) whilst exposed and moving between rocks recently disturbed during maintenance activities. *C. scabrum* are generally viewed as anthropogenous nocturnal semi-terrestrial geckos that forage on insects around sources of artificial light (Werner, 1991; Disi et al., 2001).

This small to medium sized gecko is widely distributed from Eritrea through to Pakistan including most of the Arabian Peninsula (Leviton *et al.*, 1992; Disi *et al.*, 2001). As a smallish nocturnal gecko it's predators are expected to be many although diurnal avian predators were not expected.

The situation which led to this specific individual's demise was out of the ordinary. During maintenance work at the King Khalid Wildlife Research Centre in central Saudi Arabia, approximately 80 km north of Riyadh, I noticed a *C. scabrum* moving around on rocks after having been disturbed, seemingly searching for an alternative hiding place. Whilst I was observing this an adult Great Grey Shrike perched nearby and showed interest in the distressed gecko, although it was initially put off by my presence. After a while hunger overcame prudence and the shrike attacked the gecko, seized it behind the head and consumed it, including the tail which the gecko had shed on being caught.

Shrikes are often considered raptor-like passerines preying mainly on a diverse range of invertebrates (mainly insects) and small vertebrates (Cramp & Perrins, 1993) including smaller birds (e.g. Warblers, House Sparrows and sub-adult Larks from Saudi Arabia – Robinson, *pers. comm.*). Vertebrates are consumed in relation to the season and latitude (i.e. increased vertebrates in the diet during summer and the further north one travels) with reptiles forming a small proportion of the diet (e.g. 0.5% of diet during winter in Bulgaria, (Nikolov *et al.*, 2004)).

Although my sighting of *C. scabrum* falling prey to a Great Grey Shrike could be viewed as an opportunistic meal for the shrike and not so an unusual outcome given the situation, this sighting not only confirms the dangers nocturnal species face when negotiating daylight hours, but adds the Great Grey Shrike to the list of predators *C. scabrum* has from Saudi Arabia.

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References

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