

## Predation of a Gecko by Yellow Bittern from Pakhibitan, Ecopark, West Bengal, India

The Yellow Bitterns *Ixobrychus sinensis* are commonly categorized as water birds due to their preference for wetland habitats and their dependence on aquatic environments for feeding, nesting, and other activities (Engbring et al. 1986). They are small bitterns, measuring about 38 cm in length. They belong to the family Ardeidae. This species is distributed in the Indian Subcontinent, central and eastern Asia, southeastern Asia, Philippines, and Indonesia (Ali 2002; Grimmett et al. 2011; Martínez-Vilalta et al. 2020). The wingspan is 45–55 cm. They have short necks, long legs and pointed bills suited for wading in shallow water and capturing prey. The Male has a pinkish-brown mantle and face and side of the neck are vinaceous. Females are similar to males but have rufous streaking on the fore neck and breast and buff streaking to rufous-brown mantle and scapulars (Grimmett et al. 2011; Hancock & Kushlan 2010). Their habitats are reed beds, and scrubby



Yellow Bittern catching and swallowing the Gecko *Hemidactylus* sp. © Tarak Samanta.



Location of the observation site.

growth in inland swamps as well as coastal mangroves and backwaters, inundated standing paddy crops, flooded fields, etc (Gerlach & Skerrett 2002; Martínez-Vilalta et al. 2020).

They are known for their diverse diet, which includes a variety of fish, frogs, molluscs, and insects in the Indian Subcontinent (Ali 2002). Kim & Yoo (2012) also documented the feeding behaviour during

the breeding season in South Korea. They have been observed to eat different types of insects (mosquitoes, dragonflies and damselfly larvae, water bugs, spiders, crustaceans like shrimp, amphibians (bullfrogs), and other small animals. Wells (1999), Hancock & Kushlan (2010) and Barthel & Hering (2013), noticed consumption of aquatic insects and their larvae, such as Diptera, Libellulidae, Coenagrionidae, and *Diplonychus japonica* along with small fishes like loaches, *Carassius auratus*, *Trichogaster* sp., *Misgurnus anguillicaudatus*, and *Pseudorasbora parva*; also include crustaceans such as crayfish and freshwater prawns, frogs like *Hyla arborea*, molluscs, crickets, and even lizards (Craig 1996) under poor food conditions (Ueda 1992). Yellow bitterns sometimes catch flies in flight. They typically forage alone and prefer to remain hidden and active during crepuscular and nocturnal periods and may also be seen foraging on overcast days (Hancock & Kushlan 2010).

Craig (1996) and Vice & Pitzler (1999) observed that bitterns feed on insects and lizards. There was also a record of eating a Common Sun Skink *Mabuya multifasciata* around Singapore (Wee 2008). But no such clear information on feeding a gecko *Hemidactylus* sp.

During an opportunistic survey on 28 June 2023, the authors photographed an adult *Ixobrychus sinensis* preying on a gecko of *Hemidactylus* sp. at around 1625 h from the Pakhibitan Ecopark area (22.6089 N, 88.4639 E; 18 m), situated at North 24 Parganas District, West Bengal, India. The photo was taken using a Nikon Coolpix P900 camera. A small video (15 seconds) was also taken during feeding.

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