

A record of vertebrate carnivory by the Crested Drongo (*Dicrurus forficatus*)

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The Crested Drongo (*Dicrurus forficatus*) is an arboreal passerine endemic to Madagascar and Anjouan Island in the Union of the Comoros. It is an adaptable and widespread species in Madagascar, occurring in all forest types and degraded areas. Its diet consists primarily of invertebrates, mainly insects, although small quantities of fruit are eaten (Safford, 2013a). Recorded prey items include Arachnida, Coleoptera, Diptera, Orthoptera, Hymenoptera, Hemiptera and Odonata (Goodman & Parillo, 1997; Safford, 2013a), largely caught on the wing, in mid-air or on the ground, by sallying from a prominent perch. Langrand (1995) reported the Crested Drongo as eating small chameleons, but no other records of vertebrate carnivory are known. Within the genus as a whole, only seven of the 26 species are known or suspected to consume vertebrates (del Hoyo *et al.*, 2009). A number of medium-sized, insectivorous, arboreal passerines in Madagascar have slightly hooked bills similar to that of the Crested Drongo and occasionally consume vertebrate prey, including *Bernieria madagascariensis*, *Coracina cinerea*, and the Vangidae *Schetba rufa*, *Xenopirostris xenopirostris*, *X. damii*, *Oriola bernieri*, *Tylas eduardi* and *Vanga curvirostris*. Of these, vertebrates make up an important component of the diet only in *Vanga curvirostris* (Safford & Hawkins, 2013).

At 07 h 15 on 19 September 2010 in Kirindy CNFEREF (20°04'01"S, 44°39'29"E), Menabe Region, we observed an adult Crested Drongo feeding on a fish-scaled gecko (*Geckolepis* sp.) (Figure 1). The drongo grasped the gecko against the perch in its claw and consumed it from the head end; the tail was missing, though the caudal wound appears older and drier. We identified the prey item as a *Geckolepis* on the basis of its distinctive scales

and the proportions of the prey's hind limbs (Figure 1). Of the three species currently recognised, only *G. polylepis* is known to occur in Central Menabe (Köhler *et al.*, 2009), although both *G. maculata* and *G. typica* have been recorded from the Bemaraha Plateau to the north.



Figure 1. Crested Drongo (*Dicrurus forficatus*) from Kirindy feeding on *Geckolepis* sp. (Photograph by Louise D. Jasper.)

We did not see the drongo capture the gecko, and so cannot say whether this observation represents an example of predation, scavenging, or food robbing from other birds (kleptoparasitism). Goodman *et al.* (1997) note that Crested Drongos mob other species carrying captured prey, but did not observe kleptoparasitism. *Geckolepis* usually spend daylight hours under loose bark, under stones, or in similar refugia (Glaw & Vences, 2007), where they would be expected to be beyond the reach of the Crested Drongo because this species is not known to forage by probing. The Aldabra Drongo (*D. aldabranus*) is known to “pounce upon” geckos and skinks (Frith, 1977), but this presumably refers to lizards in the open, not retrieved from refugia. Vertebrate carnivory has not been reported in the region's other two drongo species, the Mayotte Drongo (*D. waldenii*) or Grande Comore Drongo (*D. fuscipennis*) (Rocamora & Louette, 2013; Safford, 2013b).

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