

BLUETONGUE ATTACKS HARE

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The following observation was made at the Chauncy Vale Reserve near Bagdad in November 2003 by Colin Vincent, caretaker of the reserve.

“It was mid-morning and quite warm when I heard what I thought to be a bird call. The loud rasping squeal was new to my ear and was somewhat reminiscent of the sound of a distressed finch, so with curiosity aroused I embarked on an attempt to locate and perhaps identify the source of this unusual sound. Success came after a 50 m stroll through grass and scrub when I encountered a rather large blotched bluetongue engaged in an attempt to kill a leveret of approximately 12 cm in length. Initially the skink was mouthing and bearing down on the head and neck region, often gripping and forcefully rolling its body, crocodile-like, in attempts to dismember the prey. In one of these attempts an ear was removed and consumed. Eventually the skink concentrated its attention on the hind quarters and abdominal area, violently dragging and rolling the unfortunate mammal around amongst the grasses. The leveret made no attempt to escape and barely struggled, but continued its pitiful squealing throughout. I observed the ordeal for some 30 minutes before returning to my duties. The squealing continued for a total of 3-4 hours, but I was unable to carry out any follow-up investigation.”

COMMENTS

The introduced brown hare *Lepus capensis* breeds in Tasmania from August to February, giving birth to a litter of up to five fully open-eyed young of about 10 cm in length. The young ‘leverets’ are fed morning and evening, spending their time alone in a ‘form’ constructed by the female in dense grass, where they remain until weaning at about four weeks of age. Considering its size, the unfor-

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tunate individual observed by Colin was likely to have been only a very few days old and may well have been removed from the 'form' by its attacker.

The feeding strategy observed by Colin (crocodile roll) is typical of a blotched bluetongue *Tiliqua nigrolutea* (Figure 1) attempting to dismember food which it cannot swallow whole. The author has observed bluetongues removing nestlings and eggs from the nests of terrestrial breeding birds and also taking house mouse *Mus musculus*. However this new record is certainly the largest prey item ever brought to the author's attention. The author would be most interested to hear of any further unusual prey items observed to have been taken by this species.

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Figure 1. Blotched bluetongue lizard (Maria Island: Simon Grove).