

Attempted predation of the Levant Waterfrog, *Pelophylax ridibundus bedriagae* (Camerano, 1882), on the Red-bellied Tilapia, *Coptodon zillii* (Gervais, 1848)

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The Levant Waterfrog, *Pelophylax ridibundus bedriagae* (Camerano, 1882), is the sole known taxon of the Ranidae family recorded in Lebanon (Hraoui-Bloquet et al., 2002). The lineage representing this taxon belongs to the *P. ridibundus* (Pallas, 1771) group, however, molecular data suggest that the taxonomic status remains unsettled, indicating the possibility of further changes (Dufresnes et al., 2024). *Pelophylax ridibundus bedriagae* inhabits the eastern Mediterranean regions, including the western Middle East and north-eastern Africa (Akin et al., 2010).

Pelophylax populations that inhabit the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, are known to consume a wide variety of terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates such as arthropods, molluscs and annelids (Fathinia et al., 2016; Bam-E-Zar et al., 2019; Özcan et al., 2021). However, *Pelophylax* sp. are also known to be opportunistic predators that occasionally hunt small vertebrates including reptiles (e.g., Mollov et al., 2010; Nicolaou et al., 2014; Pafilis et al., 2019), amphibians (e.g., Jablonski and Vlček, 2012; Pesarakloo et al., 2017; Katsiyiannis and Tzoras, 2020; Pazderkov et al., 2023), mammals (Mollov et al., 2010), and even birds (Baier et al., 2009). Moreover, several fish species such as mosquitofish (*Gambusia* sp.) and bleak (*Alburnus* sp.) (Çiçek and Mermer, 2006, 2007; Baier et al., 2009), goldfish (*Carassius auratus*) and Stone Loach (*Barbatula barbatula*) (Ruchin and Rhyzov, 2002), carps (Cyprinidae) (Pesarakloo et al., 2017), and an unidentified ray-finned fish (Actinopterygii) (Fathinia et al., 2016) were also reported as a part of the food spectrum of waterfrogs.

Here, we supplement the previous knowledge based on the first observation of *P. r. bedriagae* predating on a Red-bellied Tilapia, *Coptodon zillii* (Gervais, 1848). The observation occurred on 15 September 2018 (at around 17:00 h local time), during a basic field investigation in an agricultural canal at El-Mansouri, Lebanon (33.1819°N, 35.1996°E; elevation 19 m). The canals are activated for irrigation use during the dry season in summer and are thus utilised by fish to migrate between both water bodies in Ras El Ain and the agricultural ponds in the area. As the water levels drop in September, many fish become stuck in the remaining water bodies and are often an easy prey for a variety of animals including different species of birds, *Natrix tessellata*, and *Potamon potamios* (Khashab, pers. observation).

We observed a weakened, dehydrated *C. zillii* partially swallowed by an adult *P. r. bedriagae* (Fig. 1). The individual was not able to push the fish any further due to its size, which was almost the same as the frog itself. The frog was observed for 32 minutes of continuous, failed attempts to swallow the fish. Due to the obvious impossibility of finishing the predation, the frog probably ended up spitting the fish out or choking after multiple attempts to consume it.

We cannot confirm whether the sighting was random or regular. However, this observation provides more evidence that *Pelophylax* species may feed on a variety of vertebrates, including *C. zillii*, only limited by the size of the prey.

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Figure 1. Levant Waterfrog, *Pelophylax ridibundus bedriagae*, attempting to swallow a Red-bellied Tilapia, *Coptodon zillii*, in El-Mansouri, Lebanon. Photo by Rami Khashab.

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