

# Unusual Foraging Method of Merops Bee-eater in Singapore

Reported by Lim Kim Chuah and Lee Tiah Khee  
Photos by Lee Tiah Khee



Two species of bee-eaters are known to occur in Singapore namely the Blue-throated Bee-eater and the Blue-tailed Bee-eater. The hunting behaviour of both these species of bee-eaters are well known. They would invariably hunt from an exposed perch often a protruding stick, an open branch, a service wire or a fence. Once a prey is spotted, the bee-eater would fly swiftly towards its prey and then snatching it in mid-air with the aerodynamic grace. It would then return to its perch to feed on its meal. Preys usually include various types of winged insects including dragonflies, bees, wasps, moths and butterflies.

While watching Blue-tailed Bee-eater at quarry pond at Hindhede Nature Park in March this year, I observed the bee-eaters would occasionally take off from their perch and then fly close to the surface of water. I noticed that they would occasionally dived into the water as if they were hunting for prey in the water or on the water surface. Unfortunately as the birds were too far away, I could not confirm my observation.

On 15 Aug, Tiah Khee was photographing Blue-throated Bee-eater at the Botanic Garden when he observed the same behaviour. The bee-eater would often visit the "lake" in the afternoon. They would fly low and circle over the lake. The birds were observed to take the occasional plunge into the water reminiscent of the diving hunting style of Little Terns. After diving into the water, some of the bee-eaters would fly to a perch and Tiah Khee reported hearing the loud distinctive sound of the bee-eater whacking its prey on a branch, probably to kill the prey and also as a means to de-venom the prey. On one occasion, Tiah Khee also observed one bee-eater with a prey in its

beak after emerging from the water. This observation confirmed my observation at Hindhede Nature Park that these Merops bee-eaters do forage for prey that lives on the water surface by plunging themselves into the water to capture their prey.

A check in the literature failed to reveal any reports of such foraging behaviour and this may be the first documented observation of Merops bee-eater hunting for preys over the water surface.



