

## Anecdotal predation events of some snakes in Ecuador

Ecuador is among the ten countries with the highest reptilian diversity, which includes 224 registered snake species (TORRES-CARVAJAL et al. 2016). However, information on natural history traits of Ecuadorian snakes is scarce with few detailed contributions to their dietary spectrum (e. g., DUELLMAN 1978; BOADA et al. 2005; CISNEROS-HEREDIA 2005; MEZA-RAMOS et al. 2010; MAFLA-ENDARA & AYALA-VARELA 2012; RAMÍREZ-JARAMILLO 2015). Publication of any anecdotal data helps to better understand these animals' ecology (MOCIÑO-DELOYA et al. 2014). The authors present predation events, supported by photographs, for five colubrid and one viperid species. Prey items were identified to the lowest taxonomic category possible, with the help of specialists.

*Dendrophidion dendrophis* (SCHLEGEL, 1837).— An individual (total length ca. 110 cm) was observed and photographed consuming the anuran *Oreobates quixensis* JIMÉNEZ DE LA ESPADA, 1872, in January, 2015, at 16:25 h, in Dayuma, Orellana (00°39'54"N, 76°48'20"W). The snake was on a low transit road and had the anuran largely swallowed, only its hind legs were exposed (Fig. 1a). This type of prey was expected for *D. dendrophis*, because it is known to be primarily anurophagous (CUNHA & NASCIMENTO 1993; MARTINS & OLIVEIRA 1998; PRUDENTE et al. 2007). The occasional presence of insects in the alimentary tract of this snake is suggested to be secondary stomach contents (MARTINS & OLIVEIRA 1998; PRUDENTE et al. 2007). The only reference for Ecuador is an adult frog *Pristimantis conspicillatus* (GÜNTHER, 1858), in the stomach contents of an adult female of this snake (DUELLMAN 1978).

*Erythrolamprus epinephelus albiventris* (JAN, 1863).— An individual (total length ca. 60 cm) was photographed (Fig. 1b) consuming the lizard *Stenocercus guentheri* (BOULENGER, 1885), in February, 2015, at 09:15 h, in Tababela, Pichincha (00°08'37"S, 78°20'56"W). Another lizard *Pholidobolus montium* (PETERS, 1863) and tadpoles and adults of *Gastrotheca riobambae*

(FOWLER, 1913), were also found as prey of this snake in Pichincha (MAFLA-ENDARA & AYALA-VARELA 2012; RAMÍREZ-JARAMILLO 2015). Data from Peru and Panama also highlight the importance of anurans (*Bufo*, *Eleutherodactylus*, *Phyllobates*) in its diet (MICHAUD & DIXON 1989).

*Erythrolamprus miliaris crysostomus* (COPE, 1868).— An individual was observed trying to ingest an armored catfish *Callichthys callichthys* (LINNAEUS, 1758), close to a small pond, ca. 50 cm deep (Fig. 1c), in December, 2013, at 21:00 h, in a forest of San Carlos community, Orellana, in buffer area of the Yasuni National Park (00°46'13"S, 75°33'39"W). At the time the event was photographed, the snake held the head of the fish, which extended its dorsal fins making the snake let go; the fish quickly plunged into the pond. The snake was collected and deposited at the Museo Ecuatoriano de Ciencias Naturales (DHMECN 10978); it measured 74.4 cm in total length.

Most information on feeding of this species comes from Brazil where prey comprises chiefly anurans, e.g., the foam nest of *Leptodactylus latrans* (STEFFEN, 1815) (referred to under *L. ocellatus* in LINGNAU & DI-BERNARDO 2006), *Lithobates catesbeianus* (SHAW, 1802) (SILVA & RIBEIRO-FILHO 2009) and *Hylodes meridionalis* (MERTENS, 1927) (LIMA & COLOMBO 2008). MARQUES & SOUZA (1993) suggested *E. miliaris* may feed on marine animals in tidal pools also, since they recorded an individual of this snake predating a Frillfin goby *Bathygobius soporator* (VALENCIENNES, 1837). MICHAUD & DIXON (1989) identified the banded knife-fish *Gymnotus carapo* LINNAEUS, 1758, as prey. Fishes seem to play an important role on the diet of this snake.

*Leptodeira annulata* (LINNAEUS, 1758).— An individual (total length ca. 80 cm) was photographed (Fig. 1d) consuming an anuran (*Leptodactylus* sp.) in October, 2010, in Kumpak, Morona Santiago (02°50'11"S, 77°57'57"W). This record is consistent with exclusively anuran (*Hyla*, *Eleutherodactylus* and *Phyllomedusa*) stomach contents in Ecuadorian specimens (DUELLMAN 1978) and also with MARTINS & OLIVEIRA (1998), who mentioned that *L. annulata* feeds on adults and tadpoles of anurans (*Bufo*, *Synapturanus*, *Adenomera*,



*Eleutherodactylus*, *Leptodactylus*, *Hyla*, *Osteocephalus*, *Scinax*) and occasionally anuran eggs and lizards.

*Pseudalsophis* sp.— A dead individual (total length ca. 60 cm) with a Lava Lizard incorporated (Fig. 1e) was found in June 26, 2010, on Santiago Island, Galapagos (00°17'11"N, 90°34'01"W). According to the record locality, the lizard corresponds to *Microlophus jacobi* (BAUR, 1892) (BENAVIDES et al. 2007), whereas, the snake could not be identified to species level because of its great similarity to both *P. dorsalis* (STEINDACHNER, 1876) and *P. steindachneri* (VAN DENBURGH, 1912) occurring on Santiago. The big size of the lizard, with one of its legs penetrating the snake's body wall (white arrow), and the low degree of digestion, suggest that the snake died from the oversized prey ingested. However, on Fernandina, another island of the Galapagos Archipelago, *Pseudalsophis biserialis* (GÜNTHER, 1860) feeds mainly on *Microlophus alberti* (BAUR, 1890) and newborn Marine Iguanas *Amblyrhynchus cristatus* BELL, 1825, as well as marine fishes (MERLEN & THOMAS 2013).

*Bothrops asper* (GARMAN, 1883).— An individual (total length ca. 200 cm) was killed by inhabitants of a cocoa farm on the road from Santo Domingo to Esmeraldas (ca. 00°13'27"N, 79°09'57"W). The snake contained an adult individual of the Central American agouti *Dasyprocta punctata* (GRAY, 1842) (Fig. 1f) (picture and information by courtesy of C. MORA).

Insects, centipedes, fishes, anurans, lizards, and snakes, including congeners, birds and mammals, rodents in particular, constitute the prey of *B. asper* (CAMPBELL & LAMAR 2004; BOADA et al. 2005; SASA et al. 2009). This species also feeds on agricultural pests such as rodents and insects, a behavior that suggests this snake to be well adapted to human environments (BOADA et al. 2005; SASA et al. 2009). Adult *D. punc-*

*tata*, which weigh 3 to 5 kg (TIRIRA 2007), represent a "new" prey item and one of the biggest registered for *B. asper*. The largest preys recorded previously are the opossum species *Caluromys derbianus*, *Didelphis marsupialis* and *Philander opossum* and the rabbit *Sylvilagus brasiliensis* (SASA et al. 2009), mammals which usually weigh between 0.4 to 2.5 kg (TIRIRA 2007).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: The authors wish to thank David Salazar-Valenzuela and Jorge H. Valencia for comments on a draft version of the manuscript, J. Sicha, Glenda Pozo and César Mora for photos and information, Daniel Escobar and F. Anaguano for fish identification and Mario Yáñez and Jorge H. Valencia for herpetofaunal identification.

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Fig. 1: Snakes from Ecuador - and their prey (opposite page).

- a – *Dendrophidion dendrophis* (SCHLEGEL, 1837) - *Oreobates quixensis* JIMÉNEZ DE LA ESPADA, 1872;  
 b – *Erythrolamprus epinephelus albiventris* (JAN, 1863) - *Sternocercus guentheri* (BOULENGER, 1885);  
 c – *Erythrolamprus miliaris chrysostomus* (COPE, 1868) - *Callichthys callichthys* (LINNAEUS, 1758);  
 d – *Leptodeira annulata* (LINNAEUS, 1758) - *Leptodactylus* sp.; e – *Pseudalsophis* sp. - *Microlophus jacobi* (BAUR, 1892); f – *Bothrops asper* (GARMAN, 1883) - *Dasyprocta punctata* (GRAY, 1842).

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KEY WORDS: Reptilia: Squamata: Serpentes: Viperidae: *Bothrops asper*; Colubridae: *Dendrophidion dendrophis*, *Erythrolamprus epinephelus albiventris*, *Erythrolamprus mliaris crysostomus*, *Leptodeira annulata*, *Pseudalsophis* sp., *Bothrops asper*; diet, prey, feeding ecology; Ecuador, Pichincha, Galapagos Islands

SUBMITTED: March 04, 2016

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Autor(en)/Author(s): Cadena-Ortiz Hector, Barahona-V. Alexis, Bahamonde-Vinueza Daniela, Brito Jorge

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