XXIX International *Ethological* Conference

Abstracts

Budapest, Hungary
August 20-27, 2005

Does the Ophiophagous *Micrurus altirostris* (southerrn coral snake) prey on any snake?

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Micrurus altirostris feeds on other slender-bodied reptiles, non-ophiophagous snakes and amphisbaenians being their main preys. Some individuals may consume lizards, and wild caught Micrurus seem to be accustomed to one of these prey types.

The genus Bothrops was never cited as a prey item for this species, although there are a couple of reports for other Micrurus species. Some viperids may feed on other reptiles (Bothrops pubescens), as some colubrids do.

We wanted to test the appeal that viperids or snake-eating colubrids may have for Micrurus altirostris. Young Bothrops alternatus and B. pubescens were presented to five adult Micrurus altirostris, in order to observe the behaviour of both species and figure out what could happen in a possible encounter among free ranging snakes.

The observations were carried out on individuals of the three species maintained in captivity at the University's serpentarium.

In most trials both snakes increased the tongue flicking frequency and orientated towards each other but soon retreated to opposite corners of the tank. Bothrops individuals tried afterwards to escape. Only two of the Micrurus individuals tried to approach several viperids presented to them, and one of them attempted to bite a B. alternatus. In all cases the coral snake finally retreated vividly.

In every trial we made it was the coral snake which approached the viperid, and then withdrew. Bothrops individuals always remained immobile until the potential aggressor turned away.

We conclude that Uruguayan M. altirostris do not identify Bothrops species as preys. An encounter between the coral snake and a viperid is possible in natural conditions, and it is highly probable that it does not imply mutual aggressive reaction, probably due to the potential risk of mutual envenomation that it involves.

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