

On the diet of *Rhadinaea decorata* (GÜNTHER, 1858)

Rhadinaea decorata (GÜNTHER, 1858) is a small diurnal leaf litter snake commonly encountered in a variety of tropical forests in Central America. In Costa Rica it is a broadly distributed and a regularly encountered species, however, little is still known of its ecology (SAVAGE 2002). In



Fig. 1: *Rhadinaea decorata* (GÜNTHER, 1858) grasping *Ameiva festiva* (LICHTENSTEIN & VON MARTENS, 1856).



Fig. 2: *Rhadinaea decorata* (GÜNTHER, 1858) swallowing *Ameiva festiva* (LICHTENSTEIN & VON MARTENS, 1856).

January 2002 on the edge of a Lowland Forest near Barra del Colorado, Costa Rica we attempted to take a photograph of a young, basking, *Ameiva festiva* (LICHTENSTEIN & VON MARTENS, 1856) (Teiidae). To our surprise as we prepared to take the photograph an adult *R. decorata* (20-30 cm TL approx.) struck out and grasped the lizard from underneath a small flat rock adjacent to the lizard (Fig. 1). It seized the lizard at the anterior and back right thigh and rapidly proceeded to constrict the individual using two coils from the upper third of its body. After approximately half a minute the snake then proceeded to swallow the lizard from the rear (Fig. 2). The photos clearly show the meal was proportional to the snake. With respect to the snake's fair challenge on such a fast and active diurnal lizard, and in the interests of nature conservation, we allowed the snake to retreat after its meal with no disturbance. This species is known to forage for small lizards, salamanders and also frogs of the genus *Eleutherodactylus* (Leptodactylidae) and their eggs (SAVAGE 2002). What was interesting about this encounter was that the snake struck clearly from within a hide suggesting that this species hunts using both a stealth 'sit and wait' approach as well as active foraging.

REFERENCE: SAVAGE, J. M. (2002): The amphibians and reptiles of Costa Rica: a herpetofauna between two continents, between two seas. Chicago (The University of Chicago Press), 934 pp.

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