



MICHAELA POWELL

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Predation on a Tarantula (*Cyrtopholis bartholomaei*) by a Puerto Rican Ground Lizard (*Ameiva exsul*)

Luis O. Nieves

Department of Biology, University of Puerto Rico at Humacao, Humacao, Puerto Rico 00791
Photographs by the author except where noted.

The Puerto Rican Ground Lizard, *Ameiva exsul* (Teiidae) is the most widely distributed ground lizard on the Puerto Rican Bank, which includes Puerto Rico, many satellite islands, and the Virgin Islands (but excluding Saint Croix, Desecheo, and islas Mona and Monito, which are on their own island banks). Although mainly coastal in their distribution, these lizards can be found at elevations >360 m above sea level in Puerto Rico and have been observed at ~525 m on Sage Mountain, Tortola, British Virgin Islands.

Male Puerto Rican Ground Lizards can exceed 20 cm in snout-vent length; females are smaller. These lizards are strictly diurnal and are most frequently observed in relatively open areas actively rooting in leaf litter and soil, using their tongues to probe for food. Puerto Rican Ground Lizards have a rather catholic diet, and are known to eat many arthropods, snails, frogs, other lizards and lizard eggs, as well as fungi, fruits, and even carrion.

The largest and most visible of the Virgin Island tarantulas is the Ground Tarantula (*Cyrtopholis bartholomaei*). These spiders build their nests in dry soil. With legs spread, they can span 10–13 cm.

Predation by a Puerto Rican Ground Lizard on a Ground Tarantula occurred at exactly 1029 h on 14 October 2007 in leaf litter associated with a rocky area along the road to the pier at White Bay on Guana Island, British Virgin Islands. An adult *Ameiva exsul* (SVL ~11 cm) was observed tongue-flicking what



A Puerto Rican Ground Lizard (*Ameiva exsul*) devours a Ground Tarantula (*Cyrtopholis bartholomei*).

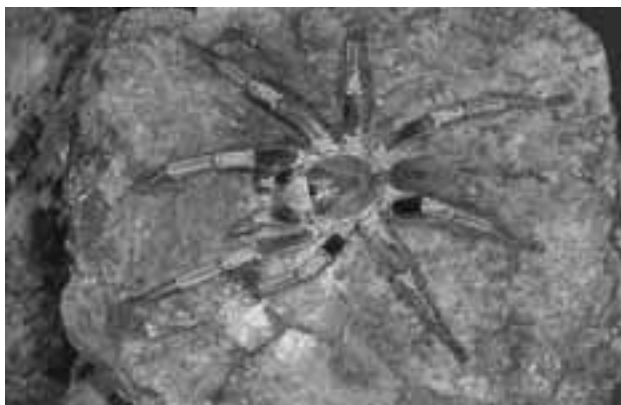
I later identified as a tarantula burrow. Initially, the lizard jumped back from the burrow, but it quickly reentered and emerged with the tarantula grasped by its abdomen. The lizard then proceeded to dismember and eat the spider. The entire episode lasted about two minutes. Subsequently, the *Ameiva* recommenced foraging.

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The Ground Tarantula (*Cyrtopholis bartholomei*) can grow quite large, spanning as much as 10–13 cm.