



Lunch Break: A Reptilian Feast

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As a traveling photographer, writer, teacher, and conservationist, I often find myself in situations where I can rightfully say aloud, “How did I get here?” Though based in Honolulu, Hawaii, for the last eight years, I have spent the better part of the last decade traveling the world volunteering — and taking photos.

I am educated in the field of anthropology, but have worked as a teacher for various non-profit organizations

whose educational curricula are conservation-based. I’ve also worked in primate rescue and rehabilitation in Africa as well as in the U.S. Mammals I know. Reptiles I don’t know as well, but they intrigue and excite me nonetheless.

In mid-July of this year, I was volunteering on a permaculture farm in Brazil, and was trading some photography for capoeira lessons (a Brazilian martial art). A day’s worth of planting saplings on a farm outside of the small town of Serra

Known as the Common Water Snake or Military Ground Snake by English speakers and as the *cobra-d’água* (= water snake) or *cobra-lisa* (= smooth snake) in Portuguese, *Erythrolamprus* (formerly *Liophis*) *miliaris* is known to take a variety of prey, including amphibians (adults, eggs, and larvae), invertebrates, lizards, fish, birds, and small rodents (Pizzatto, L. 2003. Reprodução de *Liophis miliaris* (Serpentes: Colubridae): influência histórica e variações geográficas. Unpublished MSc. Thesis, Universidade Estadual de Campinas). Consequently, this observation of an individual eating a Butter Frog or, as it is known in Brazil, Rã Manteiga (*Leptodactylus latrans*, formerly *L. ocellatus*) is not surprising. Note in the first two of this series of images the use of the snake’s body to help hold the dying frog.







Grande, State of Bahia, definitely merited a swim. Luckily, nestled among the various tropical fruit and palm trees was a picturesque pond. Every day, we swam in this pond. One day, during lunch, one of the young men who worked on the farm called us over to the shore.

As everything in Brazil, whatever it was that he had to show us was a surprise to me until I saw it, as I did not speak any Portuguese and usually got by (poorly) on my anemic Spanish. But what a surprise it was! A snake consuming a frog. “Leave her!” I called in my broken Spanish. “I’m going for my camera!”

However, no one was inclined to disturb the snake; everyone just wanted to watch. A handful of us sat next to a spectacle of nature — a representative of one species thriving, another suffocating, and the hominids enthralled.

I didn’t know the species at the time; the local people called it a “cobra.” Of course, it’s not a true cobra, as cobras do not occur in the Americas; the term instead seems to be how Brazilians refer to any snake.

What they did tell me, however, was that this particular species sure loved swimming in the farm’s picturesque pond. But not to worry! As long as I didn’t land on one when I jumped in, I would be fine.

To see more nature and wildlife photography along with my musings, please visit www.monicaszczupider.com.

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