



Predation by a Tarantula (*Sericopelma immensum*) on a Terciopelo (*Bothrops asper*) in Sierpe de Osa, Costa Rica

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Ophiophagy by spiders has been well documented (Nyffeler and Gibbons 2021), with 319 incidents involving more than 30 species of spiders preying on more than 86 species of snakes. Spiders in the tarantula family Theraphosidae were the second most important snake predators, comprising about 10% of all such accounts. Snakes in the families Colubridae and Elapidae were the most common victims, accounting for 84% of records. Reports of viperids as prey of tarantulas are rare, with a Goliath Birdeater (*Theraphosa blondi*) capturing and consuming a Common Lancehead (*Bothrops atrox*) in Venezuela and a bird spider (*Brachypelma* sp.) preying on a Terciopelo (*Bothrops asper*) in Mexico.

Tarantulas are the largest spiders in Costa Rica, with approximately 40 species of theraphosid spiders documented in the country (Platnick 2011). The genus *Sericopelma* is represented by 14 species, nine of which occur in Costa Rica (World Spider Catalog 2021). Herein we report the predation by *Sericopelma immensum* on a Terciopelo in Sierpe de Osa, Puntarenas, Costa Rica.

At 1937 h on 16 July 2021, RNE observed a snake moving in a strange way. When we approached more closely, we saw that a neonatal Terciopelo had been captured by a large tarantula. The little viper was trying to escape but the spider had grabbed the snake and was sinking its large fangs in the snake’s head (Fig. 1). At this point, the spider’s venom apparently was taking effect and the viper was not moving much. The tarantula tried to pull the snake into its burrow but JMC grabbed the snake’s tail so we could document this encounter with additional photographs. When we had finished, the tarantula quickly dragged its prey into the burrow and disappeared (Fig. 2).

Acknowledgements

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Fig. 1. A tarantula (*Sericopelma immensum*) in Sierpe de Osa, Puntarenas, Costa Rica, grabbing a neonatal Terciopelo (*Bothrops asper*) and sinking its fangs in the snake’s head. Photograph by Raby Nuñez Escalante.



Fig. 2. A tarantula (*Sericopelma immensum*) dragging a neonatal Terciopelo (*Bothrops asper*) into its burrow in Sierpe de Osa, Puntarenas, Costa Rica. Photograph by Raby Nuñez Escalante.

Literature Cited

- Nyffeler, M. and J.W. Gibbons. 2021. Spiders (Arachnida: Araneae) feeding on snakes (Reptilia: Squamata). *The Journal of Arachnology* 49: 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1636/JoA-S-20-050>.
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