Only a few of the 17 species of Tropidophis (Squamata: Tropidophiidae) in Cuba tolerate urban environments. The Giant Trope (T. melanurus), Spotted Brown Trope (T. pardalis), Spotted Red Trope (T. maculatus), and, to a lesser degree, the Yellow-banded Trope (T. semicinctus) and Gracile Banded Trope (T. wrighti) are found in such habitats (Rodríguez Schettino et al. 2013). Other species are rarely found in urban environments, which appear to impose novel selective pressures related to several key variables, including prey availability.

Feeding habits of snakes in the genus Tropidophis are poorly known (see Rodríguez-Cabrera et al. 2020a for a review). The sparse information on the diet of the Spotted Brown Trope (Fig. 1), a small ground-dwelling species, comes from urban environments — and only two synanthropic prey species (the Cuban Flat-headed Frog, Eleutherodactylus planirostris, and the Tropical House Gecko, Hemidactylus mabouia) have been recorded (Armas and Iturriaga 2017; Rodríguez-Cabrera et al. 2020a, 2020b). The Spotted Red Trope (Fig. 1), a gracile semi-arboreal species, is known to prey on anoles (Anolis spp.) and frogs of the genus Eleutherodactylus in both urban and natural environments (Rodríguez-Cabrera et al. 2020a, 2020c). Whether hard-bodied arthropods are taken by these snakes deliberately or incidentally as part of the stomach contents of vertebrate prey...
remains uncertain (Rodríguez-Cabrera et al. 2020a, 2020c). Herein we report predation events, one of them involving arthropods, by a Spotted Brown Trope and a Spotted Red Trope in urban environments in La Habana.
At about 2000 h on 15 November 2020, we found an adult female Spotted Brown Trope (250 mm SVL, 20.3 g; Fig. 2) active on the ground in a backyard in Embil, Boyeros Municipality, La Habana Province, Cuba (23.072564, -82.388313; WGS 84; elev. ~40 m asl) (Fig. 3). We noticed a stomach bulge and forced regurgitation by palpation revealed an adult Cuban Flat-headed Frog with the head and anterior part of the body already digested (Fig. 4). A small isopod (8 mm total length) was revealed during the process and a more thorough examination divulged three more isopods (one fragmented) and an ant in the stomach of the frog (Fig. 4). The arthropods were identified as three Swift Woodlice, Porcellionides pruinose (Oniscidea: Porcellionidae), one Little Sea Pillbug, Cubaris murina (Oniscidea: Armadillidae), and one African Big-headed Ant, Pheidole megacephala (Hymenoptera: Formicidae).

At about 1000 h on 18 February 2021, we found an adult female Spotted Red Trope (370 mm SVL, 35 g) (Fig. 5) under an empty drink box on a pile of debris in a backyard in Alturas de la Víbora, Arroyo Naranjo Municipality, La Habana Province, Cuba (23.058661, -82.373715; WGS 84; elev. ~60 m asl) (Fig. 3). We noticed a stomach bulge and forced regurgitation by palpation revealed an adult male Cuban Green Anole, Anolis porcatus (83 mm SVL, 12.2 g), which had been ingested head first (Fig. 6). After regurgitation the snake weighed 22.5 g, so the prey mass represented ca. 35% of the snake’s mass. No signs of digestion were evident, so we assumed that the anole had been eaten no earlier than the previous night. Note that, although we used the name “A. porcatus,” evidence supports the hypothesis that populations purportedly of this species from western Cuba (Fig. 7) are conspecific with the North American Green Anole, A. carolinensis (Glor et al. 2004, 2005; Reynolds et al. 2018; Wegener et al. 2019).

This is the third report of a Cuban Flat-headed Frog (Fig. 7) as prey of the Spotted Brown Trope (Armas and Iturriaga 2017; Rodríguez-Cabrera et al. 2020a, 2020b), which suggests that this widely distributed and often very abundant frog might be frequent prey, at least for individuals inhabiting urban areas. The two species of isopods (Fig. 8) and the ant are invasive synanthropes in Cuba, and the ant is even listed among the 100 worst invasive alien species of the world (Lowe et al. 2000; Schmalfuss 2003; Jass and Klausmeier 2006). All were extremely abundant in the backyard where we found the Spotted Brown Trope (Fig. 3). That they represent an important component in the diet of an opportunistic species such as the Cuban Flat-headed Frog is not surprising.

The bodies of the five arthropods were relatively intact when compared to the partially digested frog (Fig. 4). Such discoveries must be analyzed cautiously, since they could lead to misinterpretations regarding the diet of these snakes (see Rodríguez-Cabrera et al. 2020c for similar findings).

Because anoles tend to sleep on perches above ground level, both in plants and in human-made structures such as buildings, fence mesh, and barbed wire, the Spotted Red Trope probably found its prey using an active foraging strategy. This coincides with comments in Díaz and Cádiz (2020) and Rodríguez-Cabrera et al. (2020a, 2020c), who described this species as a climbing, semi-arboreal snake.

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Literature Cited


