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Black Spiny-tailed Iguanas (*Ctenosaura similis*) reduced their foraging efforts in the presence of a predator and a chemical cue to a predator.

under field conditions in Palo Verde National Park in northwestern Costa Rica to assess the behavioral responses of Black Spiny-tailed Iguanas (*Ctenosaura similis*) to the presence of predators and predator cues. Free-roaming iguanas were offered mango in designated areas in the presence of a predator (*Boa constrictor*), a predator cue (*B. constrictor* feces), and a control (no predator or predator cue). Results indicated that iguanas reduced their foraging efforts in the presence of both a predator and its cue.

### Courtship Behavior in the Northern Spectacled Salamander (*Salamandrina perspicillata*)

Knowledge of reproductive behavior in the Italian endemic Northern Spectacled Salamander (*Salamandrina perspicillata*) is incomplete, and the only detailed observations were made just once in a terrarium. **BRUNI AND ROMANO** (2011. *Amphibia-Reptilia* 32:63–76) described many aspects of terrestrial courtship behavior, such as male alert posture, substrate trail-marking, approach and pursuit, tail-undulation and vent-swinging, and spermatophore deposition and pick-up. The courting pair follows an ellipsoidal track. A spermatophore is deposited by the male just in front of the female, who will reach the spermatophore as she continues to circle. No body contacts were observed during the courtship. Tail movements play a key role in the communication between sexes as well as between antagonistic males. Male-male combat involves biting as the main deterrent. The authors found that the mating season in wild populations is in the spring, differing from that reported previously for mating in captivity



GIACOMO BRUNI

Male Northern Spectacled Salamanders (*Salamandrina perspicillata*) engage in varied courtship behaviors that include alert postures that might be combined with or extended to elevating the anterior body.

(winter) or extrapolated from the beginning of sperm storage (autumn).

### Reproduction in the Giant Garter Snake (*Thamnophis gigas*)

**HALSTEAD ET AL.** (2011. *The Southwestern Naturalist* 56:29–34) used mixed-effects models to examine relationships of reproductive characteristics of the Giant Garter Snake (*Thamnophis gigas*). Neonates from larger litters had lower mass, and mass of neonates also was affected by random variation among mothers. The length of the mother did not affect the relative mass of litters; however, the data suggested that longer mothers expended less reproductive effort per offspring than shorter mothers. The authors detected random variation in the length of neonates among mothers, but these lengths were not related to length of the mother or size of the litter. Mean size of litter varied among years, but little evidence existed for a relationship between size of litter or mass of litter and length of mother. Sex ratios of neonates did not differ from 1:1.



MATT MESHRY

The Giant Garter Snake (*Thamnophis gigas*), with a historical range throughout the Central Valley of California, is listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List. Because of the loss of natural habitat, this snake now relies heavily on rice fields in the Sacramento Valley, but it also uses managed marshes in protected areas. Studies of reproductive biology are essential for developing and implementing appropriate management plans. Here, a smaller male is courting the much larger female.

## NEWS BRIEF

### Colombian Easter Fare: Iguana, Turtle, or Mega-rodent

Green Iguana, Slider Turtles, and the world's largest rodent, the Capybara — but it's not a trip to the zoo. It's a traditional Easter dinner in Colombia. "This is the season we have them all coming in," said nutritionist Carolina Rangel,

at a center for confiscated animals in Bogotá, the Colombian capital, in reference to about 30 confiscated "outlawed" Slider Turtles, common here and in Venezuela, as well as a rogue Green Iguana officials picked up on a bus.

Sometimes problems crop up when the animals escape from their "caretakers," espe-

cially during the busy Easter season; many Colombians travel for hours on intercity buses to spend the holiday with family and prepare special meals. "People bring them in (from far-flung provinces) secretly, even stashed in suitcases so they can eat them with relatives, or sell them at open-air markets,"



In many Latin-American nations, iguanas, such as this Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*), are eaten the year around, but because the Catholic Church does not classify them as “meat,” consumption increases during lent and often culminates in a special Easter treat.

said local environmental official Andres Alvarez, a veterinarian.

Colombia has wildly varied geography, with tropical Pacific and Caribbean coasts and cooler Andean mountain climes that support a huge range of plant and animal life. Recipes based on local animals — instead of imported ones — have close ties to the northern and northwestern parts of the country. They often are served in the age-old recipes of indigenous peoples. Among the mouthwatering seasonal treats: Turtle eggs omelets, iguana soup, cayman or turtle stew, which is served with coconut rice and fried yucca, all washed down with cold beer. “Colombia’s gastronomic wealth is a reflection of the country’s

biodiversity,” the world’s second greatest after Brazil, said anthropologist Julian Estrada.

How the custom evolved of eating these meals at this time — the Christian celebration of Easter — is not so clear, but people who lived along rivers in what is modern-day Colombia ate all of these animals before the Spanish colonial era started in the 15th century. “For our indigenous people, the sleeper turtle and iguana are historically symbolic, mystical animals and part of age-old customs. Ultimately, what happened was that the (Roman) Catholic calendar’s tradition ended up melding with the fact that those animals are plentiful” during the spring Easter period, said



JOHN F. BINNIS

Capybara (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*) are the world’s largest rodent and can occasionally top 100 kg. Although not endangered, Colombian laws prohibit hunting during the Easter season. Nevertheless, they frequently serve as seasonal treats, and the authorities try to balance protection of the species with respect for indigenous Colombian traditions.

anthropologist Ramiro Delgado. So, while many Colombians are eagerly awaiting the arrival of an exotic little something on their Easter table, hundreds of others are trying to make sure that passengers on intercity buses are people and not animals.

Rodolfo Mendoza, the chief of the environmental police in Barrancabermeja, northwest of the capital, said that his department recently intercepted what amounted to a mini-herd of eight Capybara (the world’s largest rodent that can occasionally top 100 kg). Although not endangered, they are not supposed to be hunted at this time of the year. Authorities have to balance trying to protect the species while respecting indigenous Colombian traditions. Consequently, the hunting and sale of turtles, iguanas, and small crocodiles is illegal — but, at the same time, they are consumed by people who eat them to survive in communities where food sources are limited. The Environment Ministry says that in just four years, more than 100,000 live river turtles have been confiscated. “Our real problem is just trying to manage the use of these animals, not turning consumption into some big crime,” said government biodiversity expert Claudia Rodriguez. “Above all because in some poor rural areas, they are the only food people have.”

Adapted from a news article by  
Michael Cancela-Kieffer  
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