



# Predation by a Cope’s False Coralsnake, *Pliocercus euryzonus* (Cope 1862) (Dipsadidae), on a Catfish (Trichomycteridae: *Trichomycterus*) in the Northern Andes of Colombia

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Cope’s False Coralsnake (*Pliocercus euryzonus*), a medium-sized, non-venomous dipsadid that reaches a maximum total length of 795 mm, with the tail comprising 38–43% of total length (Savage 2002), is distributed in tropical forests at elevations of 0–2,750 m asl from northeastern Honduras, eastern Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, western Colombia, and northwestern Ecuador (Wallach et al. 2014). *Pliocercus euryzonus* is an uncommon species that forages in leaf litter on the forest floor (Savage 2002). Savage (2002) reported that the closely related Variegated False Coralsnake (*P. elapoides*) appears to feed mainly on small amphibians (e.g., *Bolitoglossa* spp.). To the best of our knowledge, the only known data on the diet of *P. euryzonus* is a single record of an individual feed-

ing on the eggs of Red-eyed Treefrogs (*Agalychnis callidryas*) in Panama (Vriesendorp and Robertson 2007).

Species in the genus *Trichomycterus* (Valenciennes 1832) are small Neotropical catfishes (Siluriformes) that are widely distributed on both sides of the Andes at elevations from sea level to nearly 4,500 m from Costa Rica to Argentina (Fernández and Vari 2004; Fernández and Osinaga 2006; Castellanos-Morales 2010; Ochoa et al. 2020). In Colombia, the genus is represented by 56 species that are distributed in trans-Andean piedmont and montane river systems, mostly small streams characterized by clear water, rapids, and shorelines with little vegetation (Román-Valencia 2001; DoNascimento and Prada Pedreros 2020). These fish are



**Fig. 1.** An adult male Cope’s False Coralsnake (*Pliocercus euryzonus*) (EAFIT-R 0036; SVL 49 cm; tail partially lost) (left); dorsal (top) and ventral (bottom) views of a slightly digested catfish (*Trichomycterus* sp.) (EAFIT-P 001; total length 8.5 cm) extracted from EAFIT-R 0036 (right). Photographs by Esteban Garzón-Franco.

benthophagous mesopredators that feed mainly on insects, mollusks, annelids, and crustaceans (Román-Valencia 2001). Little is known about natural predators; the only previous report of predation on a *Trichomycterus rosablanca* is by a freshwater crab, *Neostrengeria charalensis* (Longo et al. 2019). Herein, we document predation on a catfish in the genus *Trichomycterus* by a Cope's False Coralsnake and additional information on microhabitat use by this snake at localities in the northern Andes of Colombia.

At 2039 h on 12 June 2019, during a survey for amphibians and reptiles at El Águila farm in Montebello Village, Municipality of Santo Domingo, Antioquia, Colombia (6.49775°N, 75.18575°W; WGS 84; elev. 1,949 m asl), we found an adult male *Pliocercus euryzonus* (EAFIT-R 0021) submerged in a puddle barely surrounded by vegetation in the middle of a small streamlet that feeds into Santiago Creek. In response to our presence, it tried to escape downstream by swimming underwater. Once collected and euthanized, we noticed a stomach bulge, which we dissected and from which we extracted a single catfish (*Trichomycterus* sp.) (EAFIT-P 001) that had been ingested head-first (Fig. 1). The slightly digested snout indicated that predation probably had occurred recently. To the best of our knowledge, this is the very first documented report of predation by a snake in the genus *Pliocercus* on a fish and more specifically on a catfish of the genus *Trichomycterus*.

We have previously recorded similar behavior and microhabitat use by other individual *P. euryzonus* in different localities in the northern Andes (Fig. 2). From 26–28 July 2018, we collected two individuals in mid-elevation pristine forest in Anorí Municipality (7.34714°N, 75.11954°W; elev. 882 m asl). The first (EAFIT-R 0021), a small juvenile, was found at night (ca. 2000 h) foraging on the surface of a small stream; the second (EAFIT-R 0022), a large adult female, also was found at night (ca. 2100 h) foraging underwater in a pool

next to a small waterfall. Two additional records on 3 and 8 February 2021 were in mid-elevation fragmented forest in Amalfi Municipality (6.96701°N, 74.92848°W; elev. 1,200–1,300 m asl). Both were juveniles, one swimming on the surface of a small stream and the second stationary in a pool in the middle of another small stream. Neither was collected.

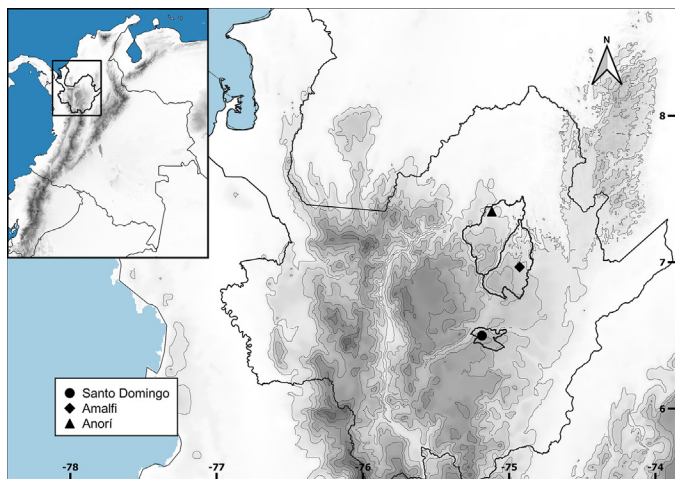
The anecdotal observations reported herein suggest that *P. euryzonus* is nocturnally active and spends a considerable amount of time foraging in water, similar to what has been observed in other South American dipsadids, including species in the genera *Erythrolamprus*, *Tretanorhinus*, *Thamnodynastes*, and *Helicops* (de Carvalho Teixeira et al. 2017; Bortolanza-Filho et al. 2019; López-Hurtado et al. 2020; Eisfeld and Vrcibradic 2019).

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**Fig. 2.** Localities of the observations of Cope's False Coralsnakes (*Pliocercus euryzonus*) in the northern Andes of Antioquia Department, Colombia.

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