



# Predation on a Velvet Worm, *Epiperipatus* sp. (Onychophora: Peripatidae), by a Striped Glasstail, *Urotheca guentheri* (Squamata: Dipsadidae), in Costa Rica

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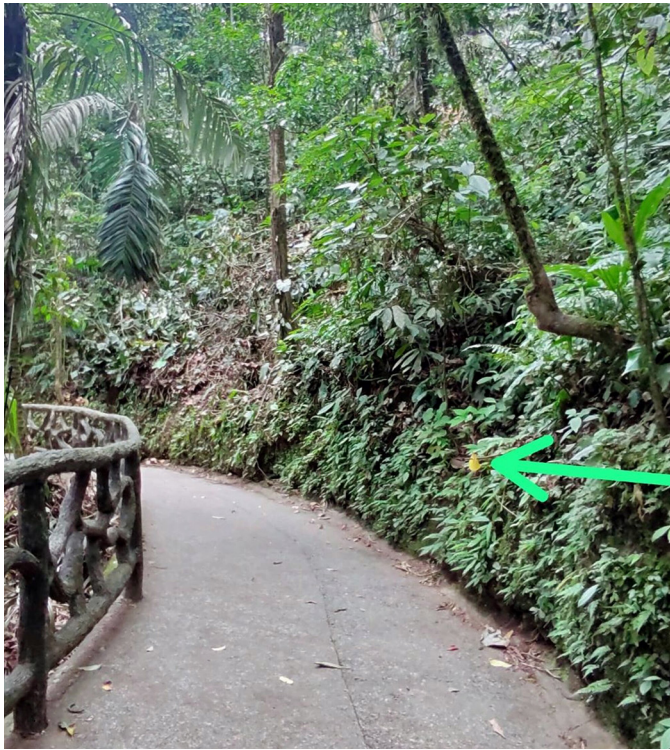
The Striped Glasstail (*Urotheca guentheri* Dunn 1938) is a small dipsadid (maximum total length ~70 cm) distributed from Honduras to Darién in the Chocó Region of Panama (Solórzano 2022). In Costa Rica, it mainly inhabits medium- to high-elevation rainforests along the northern and northeastern Caribbean slope, Caribbean and Pacific sectors of the Cordillera de Tilarán, and the southern and southwestern Pacific slopes of the Cordillera de Talamanca at elevations from sea level to 2,500 m asl (Solórzano 2022). It is active during the day and primarily ground dwelling. Its diet consists primarily of frogs, tadpoles, and possibly small lizards (Savage 2002; Leenders 2019). Abarca et al. (2024) recently reported predation on a Pacific Banded Coffee Snake (*Ninia maculata*) by an adult *U. guentheri*, broadening its selection of prey to include small snakes. The evidence seems to suggest that, although they feed most frequently on amphibians (especially frogs), species of *Urotheca* (including *Pliocercus euryzonus*, which was previously included in this genus) are opportunistic predators (Vriesendorp and Robertson 2007; Durango et al. 2022; Griesbaum et al. 2023; Sosa-Bartuano and Toribio 2023), although their feeding habits in general remain poorly understood.

Herein, we report an adult *U. guentheri* preying on an onychophoran, or velvet worm. At 1122 h on 4 May 2024, we observed an adult Striped Glasstail consuming an unidentified species of velvet worm (*Epiperipatus* sp., Peripatidae) approximately 8 cm long (Fig. 1) along a tourist trail in rainforest vegetation (Fig. 2) in Místico Arenal Hanging Bridges Park in La Fortuna, Alajuela Province, on the northwestern Pacific Coast of Costa Rica (10.49012, -85.26061). The onychophoran was still alive and moving when the snake had ingested nearly half of its body, starting with the head. The strategy employed by the snake to avoid the velvet worm's defensive secretions (Monge-Nájera and Aguilar 1993) remains unknown.

Previous reports of predation on onychophorans include spiders (Franco and Monge-Nájera 2016), a single



**Figure 1.** An adult Striped Glasstail (*Urotheca guentheri*) eating an unidentified species of velvet worm (*Epiperipatus* sp., Peripatidae), in Místico Hanging Bridges Park in La Fortuna de San Carlos, Alajuela Province, Costa Rica. Photograph by Julio Méndez Fallas.



**Figure 2.** Habitat along the tourist trail in Místico Hanging Bridges Park in La Fortuna de San Carlos, Alajuela Province, Costa Rica, where an adult Striped Glasstail (*Urotheca guentheri*) was eating a velvet worm. Photograph by Julio Méndez Fallas.

case in Costa Rica involving Slevin's Tropical Groundsnake (*Trimetopon slevini*, Dipsadidae) (Smokoska and Chaves 2017), and the South American Western Worm-eating Coralsnake (*Micrurus ortonii*, formerly *M. hemprichii ortonii*) (Roze 1996; Campbell and Lamar 2004; Vuolo Marques and Sazima 2021). The observation recorded herein is the first record of a Striped Glasstail preying on a velvet worm.

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