



Saurophagy in Brazilian Lizards with New Records in the Brazilian Semiarid Region

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Abstract.—Predation is one of the principal pressures affecting natural populations. Saurophagy is an opportunistic behavior that can affect natural populations, especially juveniles. We observed predation events in the Chapada do Araripe and herein present a review of the literature on saurophagy in Brazilian lizards. Despite the large number of lizards collected, only 0.8% showed some form of saurophagy, with *Micrablepharus maximiliani* being the most frequent prey. In Brazil, lizards in ten families are known to engage in saurophagy, with teiids and tropidurids being the frequently documented predators.

Predation is one of the principal pressures affecting natural populations, and inter- and intraspecific predation are two important means of population control (e.g., Vitt 2000; Passos et al. 2016). Saurophagy, a predatory behavior that involves the consumption of lizards by other lizards (e.g., Ventura dos Reis et al. 2017; Mascarenhas-Junior et al. 2021), often is associated with interspecific sympatry (e.g., Zaluar and Rocha 2000) or cannibalism (e.g., Vrcibradic and Rocha 1996a; Sales et al. 2010b, 2011; Nino et al. 2021). Saurophagy in lizards is considered an opportunistic behavior that exerts pressure in the form of mortality, especially on juveniles (e.g., Rojas-Runjaic et al. 2006; Siqueira and Rocha 2008; J.C.L. Costa et al. 2010), but also provides nutritional benefits for the predator (e.g., Nino et al. 2016). We herein describe observations of saurophagy on the Chapada do Araripe of northeastern Brazil, and present a literature review of saurophagy in Brazil.

Materials and Methods

We surveyed four different environments on the Chapada do Araripe in Ceará, Brazil, one in each elevational zone and representing four distinct phytogeographies: a surrounding caatinga matrix (200–400 m asl) (Municipality of Várzea Alegre; -6.872222, -39.218333; 304 m asl) and three relict environments, dense humid forest limited to a narrow strip on the slope (“mata úmida”; 600–800 m asl) (Municipality of Barbalha; -7.365555, -39.328333; 760 m asl), cerrado/cer-

radão (800–900 m asl) (Municipality of Barbalha; -7.365277, -39.440555; 913 m asl), and carrasco on the top of the plateau (800–920 m asl) (Municipality of Crato; -7.290833, -39.570000; 910 m asl).

We conducted surveys over 120 days (30 days per area divided into two periods of 15 days, one during the rainy season and the other during the dry season). We captured lizards by day and night using pitfall traps, airguns (4 mm caliber), snares, and slingshots, took them to the laboratory where they were euthanized using lidocaine injections (CFMV 2013), measured SVL to 0.01 mm, fixed specimens in 10% formalin, and preserved them in 70% alcohol (Auricchio and Salomão 2002). Stomach contents were examined using stereoscopes and lizards that had been consumed were identified when possible. Specimens were deposited in the Herpetology Collection of the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB) and the Regional University of Cariri (URCA) under SISBIO collection licenses 29838-1 and 29838-2.

We subsequently conducted a review of saurophagy in Brazilian lizards using online databases Portal Periódico Capes, Jstor, Scielo, and Google Scholar to search for key words (saurophagy, cannibalism, lizards, diet, predation, and community) in English and Portuguese, and supplemented those searches by reviewing literature cited in those references. Taxonomy follows the list of reptiles in Brazil (H.C. Costa et al. 2021).

Results

We collected a total of 1,177 lizards (23 species) of which only 10 (0.8%) (six species) contained lizards (Fig. 1): (1) A female *Tropidurus hispidus* (Peters' Lava Lizard; SVL 77.39 mm) had preyed on a *Micrablepharus maximiliani* (Maximilian's Blue-tailed Lizard), (2) an adult male *T. hispidus* (SVL 110.4 mm) on a juvenile *Ameivula pyrrhogularis* (Tijubina Lizard), (3) a juvenile *Tropidurus semitaeniatus* (Striped Lava Lizard; SVL 34.23 mm) contained the legs of an unidentified lizard, (4) a male *Ameivula pyrrhogularis* (SVL 61.31 mm) contained the tail of an unidentified lizard, (5) a female *Ameivula pyrrhogularis* (SVL 61.73 mm) had ingested a *M. maximiliani*, (6) a male *Norops brasiliensis* (Brazilian Anole; SVL 57.16 mm) contained parts of unidentified lizards, (7–8) two female *N. brasiliensis* (SVL 61.44 and 63.64 mm) had preyed on a *M. maximiliani*, (9) a male *Copeoglossum arajara* (Arajara Mabuya; SVL 72.51 mm) contained the tail of an unidentified lizard, and (10) a male *Colobosaura modesta* (Bahia Colobosaur; SVL 40.07 mm) contained the legs of an unidentified lizard. The species *Micrablepharus maximiliani* was the most frequently taken prey in our study, which provided the first records of this species being taken by *Ameivula pyrrhogularis* and *Norops brasiliensis*.

In the literature review (Table 1), we identified ten families of Brazilian lizards with records of saurophagy. The largest documented predators were in the family Teiidae: *Salvator merianae* (Argentine Tegu) and *Ameiva ameiva* (Giant Ameiva), and the smallest were in the family Gymnophthalmidae:

Colobosaura modesta and *Colobosauroides cearensis* (NCN). With nine records, the most frequently documented prey was *Hemidactylus mabouia* (Tropical House Gecko).

Discussion

Saurophagy can be attributed to several factors, including species that share the same trophic niche (e.g., Dias and Rocha 2004; Costa-Campos and Furtado 2013), availability, territorial overlap (Kokubum and Lemos 2004; M.C. Oliveira et al. 2020), opportunism, or low availability of food resources (Ribeiro and Freire 2011). In our study, records of *Ameivula pyrrhogularis* and *Norops brasiliensis* consuming the small lizard *Micrablepharus maximiliani* are consistent with observations that small and/or juvenile lizards are particularly vulnerable to attack (e.g., Faria and Araújo 2004).

Although we provide the first record of saurophagy in *Copeoglossum arajara*, it has been observed in other scincid species such as *Brasiliscincus agilis* (Bahia Small-headed Skink) (Vrcibradic and Rocha 1995a), *Psychosaura macrorhyncha* (Hoge's Mabuya) (Vrcibradic and Rocha 1995b), *Notomabuya frenata* (Cope's Mabuya) (Vrcibradic and Rocha 1998), and *Brasiliscincus heathi* (Brazilian Mabuya) (Alcantara et al. 2015). *Copeoglossum arajara* is considered a generalist opportunist (Ribeiro et al. 2015), and these new records are consistent with occasional consumption of juvenile conspecifics (Vrcibradic and Rocha 1996b).

Although the gymnophthalmid *Colobosaura modesta* was mentioned as possible prey for lizards in the genus *Tropidurus*

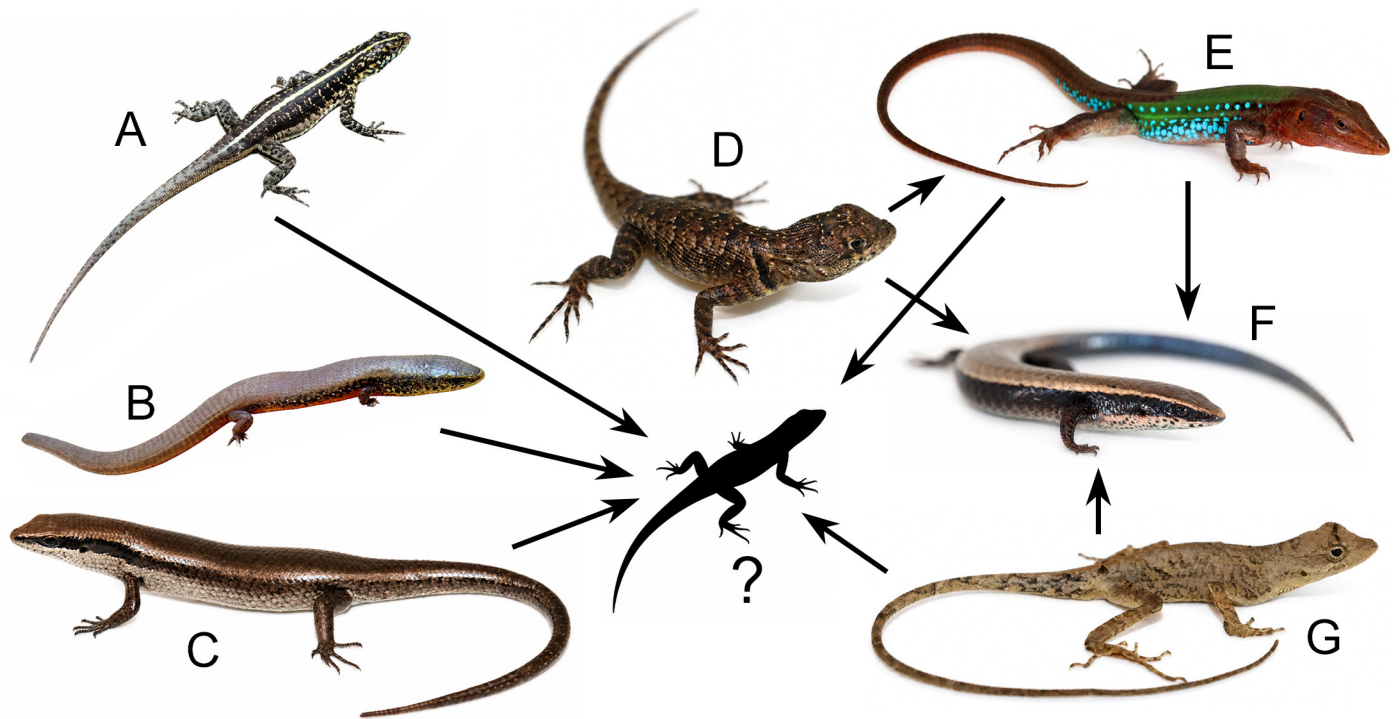


Figure 1. Predator-prey flow during episodes of saurophagy (arrows) among lizards in the Chapada do Araripe in a semi-arid region of Brazil. A. *Tropidurus semitaeniatus*, B. *Colobosaura modesta*, C. *Copeoglossum arajara*, D. *Tropidurus hispidus*, E. *Ameivula pyrrhogularis*, F. *Micrablepharus maximiliani*, G. *Norops brasiliensis*, and unidentified lizards indicated by the question mark. Photographs by Samuel Cardozo Ribeiro.

Table 1. Saurophagy in Brazilian lizards. * = at least some predators collected in pitfall traps.

PREDATOR	PREY	STATE	REFERENCE
Anolidae			
<i>Norops brasiliensis</i>	<i>Coleodactylus meridionalis</i>	Ceará	Amorim 2018
	<i>Micrablepharus maximiliani</i>	Ceará	This study
	Not identified	Ceará	This study
<i>Norops auratus</i>	<i>Kentropyx striata</i>	Pará	Santos-Jr et al. 2018
	Not identified	Pará	Vitt et al. 2003
<i>Dactyloa punctata</i>	Not identified	Pará	Vitt et al. 2003
<i>Dactyloa transversalis</i>	Not identified	Pará	Vitt et al. 2003
Diploglossidae			
<i>Ophiodes fragilis</i>	<i>Ophiodes fragilis</i>	Rio Grande do Sul	Montechiaro and Adams 2009
Gekkonidae			
<i>Hemidactylus mabouia</i>	<i>Hemidactylus mabouia</i>	Amapá	Costa-campo and Furtado 2013
		Espírito Santo	Zamprogno and Teixeira 1998
		Rio Grande do Sul	Bonfiglio et al. 2006
	<i>Hemidactylus agrius</i>	Mato Grosso do Sul	N.R. de Albuquerque et al. 2013
<i>Hemidactylus agrius</i>	<i>Hemidactylus agrius</i>	Rio Grande do Norte	Monte de Andrade et al. 2020
Gymnophthalmidae			
<i>Colobosaura modesta</i>	Not identified	Ceará	This study*
<i>Colobosauroides cearensis</i>	<i>Coleodactylus meridionalis</i>	Paraíba	Canuto Medeiros et al. 2019
Leiosauridae			
<i>Enyalius perditus</i>	<i>Hemidactylus mabouia</i>	São Paulo	Muscat et al. 2016
Liolaemidae			
<i>Liolaemus lutzae</i>	<i>Liolaemus lutzae</i>	Rio de Janeiro	Rocha 1992
Phyllodactylidae			
<i>Phyllopezus periosus</i>	<i>Hemidactylus agrius</i>	Rio Grande do Norte	Palmeira et al. 2021
	<i>Tropidurus semitaeniatus</i>	Rio Grande do Norte	Palmeira et al. 2021
<i>Phyllopezus pollicaris</i>	Lizard eggs	Goiais	Werneck et al. 2009*
	<i>Gymnodactylus geckoides</i>	Pernambuco	Carvalho et al. 2024
<i>Homonota uruguayensis</i>	<i>Homonota uruguayensis</i>	Rio Grande do Sul	Nunes 2009
<i>Gymnodactylus amarali</i>	Not identified	Goiais	Colli et al. 2003
Scincidae			
<i>Brasiliscincus beathi</i>	<i>Coleodactylus meridionalis</i>	Paraíba	Alcantara et al. 2015
<i>Copeoglossum arajara</i>	Not identified	Ceará	This study
<i>Brasiliscincus agilis</i>	<i>Hemidactylus mabouia</i>	Rio de Janeiro	Vrcibradic 2001
			Vrcibradic and Rocha 2002
	<i>Tropidurus torquatus</i>	Espírito Santo	Vrcibradic and Rocha 1995a
	<i>Gymnodactylus darwini</i>	Rio de Janeiro	Vrcibradic and Rocha 1996a
<i>Psychosaura macrorhyncha</i>	<i>Hemidactylus mabouia</i>	Rio de Janeiro	Vrcibradic and Rocha 1995b
		Espírito Santo	Teixeira 2001
<i>Notomabuya frenata</i>	<i>Notomabuya frenata</i>	São Paulo	Vrcibradic and Rocha 1996b
	<i>Cercosaura</i> sp.	São Paulo	Vrcibradic and Rocha 1998

PREDATOR	PREY	STATE	REFERENCE
<i>Trachylepis atlanticus</i>	<i>Trachylepis atlanticus</i>	Pernambuco	Silva-Jr. et al. 2005
	<i>Hemidactylus mabouia</i>	Pernambuco	Gasparini et al. 2007
Teiidae			
<i>Ameiva ameiva</i>	Not identified	Pernambuco	Vitt 1995
	<i>Ameiva ameiva</i>	Pernambuco	Nino et al. 2021
	<i>Tropidurus hispidus</i> (eggs)	Pernambuco	Nino et al. 2016
	<i>Ameivula pyrrhogularis</i>	Rio Grande do Norte	Gogliath et al. 2010
	<i>Brasiliscincus agilis</i>	Rio de Janeiro	Zaluar and Rocha 2000
	<i>Tropidurus torquatus</i>	Rio de Janeiro	Zaluar and Rocha 2000
	<i>Vanzosaura multiscultata</i>	Rio Grande do Norte	Sales et al. 2010b
<i>Ameivula nigrigula</i>	<i>Ameivula nigrigula</i>	Bahia	M.L.T. Oliveira et al. 2017
<i>Ameivula ocellifera</i>	Not identified	Pernambuco	Vitt 1995
	<i>Tropidurus hygomi</i>	Bahia	Santos et al. 2009
	<i>Tropidurus hispidus</i>	Pernambuco	Gonçalves-Sousa et al. 2019*
			Tavares et al. 2017
	<i>Hemidactylus brasiliensis</i>	Pernambuco	Gonçalves-Sousa et al. 2019*
<i>Ameivula pyrrhogularis</i>	<i>Ameivula pyrrhogularis</i>	Rio Grande do Norte	Sales et al. 2010a
	<i>Micrablepharus maximiliani</i>	Ceará	This study
	Not identified	Ceará	This study
	<i>Tropidurus hispidus</i>	Pernambuco	Silva et al. 2013
<i>Glaucomastix abaetensis</i>	<i>Tropidurus hygomi</i>	Bahia	Dias and Rocha 2004
<i>Glaucomastix littoralis</i>	<i>Hemidactylus mabouia</i>	Rio de Janeiro	Menezes et al. 2006
<i>Kentropyx calcarata</i>	<i>Norops fuscoauratus</i>	Paraíba	Franzini et al. 2017
<i>Kentropyx striata</i>	<i>Norops auratus</i>	Pará	Santos-Jr et al. 2018
<i>Salvator merianae</i>	Not identified	Pernambuco	Vitt 1995
	<i>Trachylepis atlanticus</i>	Pernambuco	Silva Jr. et al. 2005
	<i>Tropidurus hygomi</i>	Bahia	Santos et al. 2009
	<i>Ameiva ameiva</i>	Minas Gerais	Lima and Wild 2020
	<i>Trachylepis atlanticus</i>	Pernambuco	Péres-Junior 2003
Tropiduridae			
<i>Tropidurus cocorobensis</i>	<i>Scriptosaura catimbau</i>	Pernambuco	Marques do A. Oliveira and Sales Nunes 2020
<i>Tropidurus hispidus</i>	Not identified	Pernambuco	Vitt 1995
	<i>Ameiva ameiva</i>	Pernambuco	Rodrigues et al. 2015
	<i>Ameivula ocellifera</i>	Pernambuco	Delfino de Sousa et al. 2021
		Pernambuco/Rio Grande do Norte	Claro et al. 2024
	<i>Ameivula pyrrhogularis</i>	Maranhão	J.C.L. Costa et al. 2010
		Ceará	Zanchi et al. 2012
		Ceará	This study
	<i>Brasiliscincus heathi</i>	Paraíba/Rio Grande do Norte	Claro et al. 2024
	<i>Colobosaura modesta</i>	Maranhão	J.C.L. Costa et al. 2010
	<i>Gymnodactylus geckoides</i>	Pernambuco/Bahia	Pergentino et al. 2017
			Chagas-de-Souza et al. 2024
	<i>Hemidactylus mabouia</i>	Pernambuco	Silva et al. 2012
			Mascarenhas-Junior et al. 2021
		Bahia	Pagel et al. 2020
		Pernambuco/Rio Grande do Norte	Claro et al. 2024
	<i>Phyllorhynchus pollicaris</i>	Pernambuco	Dubeux et al. 2020
			Delfino de Sousa et al. 2021

PREDATOR	PREY	STATE	REFERENCE
	<i>Micrablepharus maximiliani</i>	Ceará	This study
		Pernambuco/Rio Grande do Norte	Claro et al. 2024
	<i>Vanzosaura multiscutata</i>	Ceará	M.C. Oliveira et al. 2020
	<i>Norops auratus</i>	Amapá	Costa-Campos and Souza 2013
	<i>Tropidurus jaguaribanus</i>	Ceará	Passos et al. 2016
	<i>Tropidurus hispidus</i>		
		Rio Grande do Norte	Sales et al. 2011
		Bahia	Maia-Carneiro et al. 2016
		Sergipe	Ferreira et al. 2017*
		Pernambuco	Delfino de Sousa et al. 2021
		Pernambuco/Rio Grande do Norte	Claro et al. 2024
	<i>Tropidurus</i> sp.	Minas Gerais	Van Sluys et al. 2004
	<i>Vanzosaura multiscutata</i>	Sergipe	Ferreira et al. 2017*
	<i>Hemidactylus brasiliensis</i>	Pernambuco	Gonçalves-Sousa et al. 2019*
<i>Tropidurus hygoni</i>	<i>Tropidurus hygoni</i>	Bahia	Dias and Rocha 2004
			Kohlsdorf et al. 2004
	<i>Coleodactylus meridionalis</i>	Bahia	Vargens et al. 2005
<i>Tropidurus itambere</i>	<i>Ameivula ocellifera</i>	Goiais	Faria and Araújo 2004
	<i>Tropidurus</i> sp.	Goiais	Faria and Araújo 2004
<i>Tropidurus montanus</i>	<i>Ameivula cipoensis</i>	Minas Gerais	Yves et al. 2021
	<i>Eurolophosaurus nanuzae</i>	Minas Gerais	Ventura dos Reis et al. 2017
	<i>Rhachisaurus brachylepis</i>	Minas Gerais	Kiefer 1998
	<i>Tropidurus montanus</i>	Minas Gerais	Kiefer and Sazima 2002
	<i>Tropidurus</i> sp.	Minas Gerais	Van Sluys et al. 2004
<i>Tropidurus oreadicus</i>	Not identified	Goiais	Faria and Araújo 2004
	<i>Micrablepharus maximiliani</i>	Goiais	Faria and Araújo 2004
	<i>Cercosaura schreibersii</i>	Rondônia	S. Albuquerque 2010
	<i>Tropidurus oreadicus</i>	Rondônia	Araújo 1987
			S. Albuquerque 2010
<i>Tropidurus semitaeniatus</i>	Not identified	Ceará	This study
		Pernambuco	Vitt 1995
	<i>Vanzosaura rubricauda</i>	Sergipe	Ferreira et al. 2017*
<i>Tropidurus torquatus</i>	<i>Ameivula ocellifera</i>	Goiais	Kokubum and Lemos 2004
	<i>Glaucomastix littoralis</i>	Rio de Janeiro	Kiefer et al. 2006
	<i>Psychosaura macrorhyncha</i>	Rio de Janeiro	Kiefer et al. 2006
	<i>Tropidurus torquatus</i>	Espírito Santo	Kiefer et al. 2006
	<i>Ameivula nativo</i>	Espírito Santo	Guimarães and Srbek-Araujo 2018*
		Espírito Santo	Peloso and Pavan 2007
	<i>Brasiliscincus agilis</i>	Espírito Santo	Teixeira and Giovanelli 1999
		Espírito Santo	Teixeira 2001
	<i>Gymnodactylus darwini</i>	Espírito Santo	Teixeira and Giovanelli 1999
		Espírito Santo	Teixeira 2001
	<i>Hemidactylus mabouia</i>	Rio de Janeiro	Araújo 1991
		Espírito Santo	Teixeira and Giovanelli 1999
		Espírito Santo	Teixeira 2001
		Minas Gerais	Galdino and Van Sluys 2004
	<i>Psychosaura macrorhyncha</i>	Espírito Santo	Kiefer et al. 2006
		Rio de Janeiro	Siqueira et al. 2013
	<i>Glaucomastix littoralis</i>	Rio de Janeiro	Siqueira et al. 2013
	<i>Tropidurus torquatus</i>	Bahia	Dutra 1996
		Espírito Santo	Siqueira et al. 2013

(J.C.L. Costa et al. 2010), it was a predator in our study. This record adds new information on the diet of this species, which normally comprises arthropods (e.g., Werneck et al. 2009; Torelli et al. 2017). The inclusion of lizards in the diets of small gymnophthalmids is not common; we found only one previous record of saurophagy for *Colobosauroides cearensis* (Canuto Medeiros et al. 2019).

Pitfall traps can increase the occurrence of unusual predation events (Zanini Cechin and Martins 2000), and this could introduce a bias based on collection methods. However, in our data only the gymnophthalmid *Colobosaura modesta* was widely captured by pitfalls, and the advanced stage of digestion of prey found in stomachs suggested that ingestion occurred prior to capture.

In our review of the literature, *Hemidactylus mabouia* was the most frequently documented prey species. The number of records could reflect its wide distribution throughout Brazil (Anjos and Rocha 2008), providing a greater likelihood of encounters with other species. This and the fact that it is a small species (SVL 67.9 mm; Kluge 1969) likely played a role as well.

Of the 125 instances of saurophagy and cannibalism in Brazilian lizards, 52% were predation events recorded by lizards in the family Tropiduridae and 19.5% for lizards in the family Teiidae. Tropidurids generally are territorial predators with generalist and opportunistic diets (e.g., Kiefer and Sazima 2002; Vargens et al. 2005) and were documented in the most studies that reported saurophagy (e.g., Rodrigues et al. 2015; Oliveira and Sales Nunes 2020; Delfino de Sousa et al. 2021) and cannibalism (e.g., Dias and Rocha 2004; Passos et al. 2016). Also, *Tropidurus hispidus* alone was responsible for 21.4% of all recorded predation events. The family Teiidae comprises carnivorous predators that feed primarily on arthropods (e.g., Santana et al. 2010; Sales et al. 2012). However, they appear in studies of saurophagy in Brazil as prey (Tavares et al. 2017), predators (Pereira da Silva et al. 2013), and cannibals (Sales et al. 2010b).

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