



Necrophagy by a Cuban Racer, *Cubophis cantherigerus* (Squamata: Dipsadidae)

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Necrophagy, facultative or obligatory consumption of carrion (DeVault et al. 2003), has been observed in various animal groups, including insects, arachnids, and vertebrates (e.g., Trujillo et al. 2021; Fuentes and Quiroz-Espinoza 2024). Despite benefits such as reduction of energetic cost associated with finding food versus killing prey (DeVault et al. 2003), necrophagy is not common in snakes as they usually prefer live prey (Pough et al. 2016).

Nonetheless, reported cases suggest that this behavior might be more frequent than previously thought (see Table 1 in DeVault and Krochmal 2002), and necrophagy has been reported in at least seven families of snakes: Acrochordidae (Shine 1986), Viperidae (Diller 1990; Heinrich and Studenroth 1996), Boidae (Rodríguez-Durán 1996; Nascimento Barbosa et al. 2022), Elapidae (Marques et al. 2017), Colubridae (e.g., Mondino et al. 2022), Dipsadidae (e.g., Otto and Miller 2004; Gomes et al. 2017; Smith and Rojas 2023; Fuentes and Quiroz-Espinoza 2024), and Natricidae (Muszyńska et al. 2022). Because the most

common method of analyzing diets in reptiles is examination of stomach contents, necrophagy likely is underreported (e.g., Smith and Rojas 2023; Gamez-Duarte et al. 2024; Salazar-Saavedra 2024). Consequently, field observations can be crucial for obtaining information on what appears to be an uncommon feeding strategy, especially in Cuban reptiles (Armas and Iturriaga 2025).

The Cuban Racer (*Cubophis cantherigerus*) is widely distributed in the Cuban Archipelago (Rodríguez-Schettino et al. 2013), where it occupies diverse habitats ranging from coastal areas to elevations as high as 1,800 m asl, including human-modified situations such as urban yards and parks (Henderson and Powell 2009; Estrada 2012; Rodríguez-Cabrera et al. 2018). Moreover, it is not only a habitat generalist but also a dietary generalist. The Cuban Racer is a diurnal active forager that consumes a wide variety of prey, most of them vertebrates such as lizards, frogs, hatchling turtles, snakes including congeners, birds, bats, small rodents, and some invertebrates like crabs (e.g., Rodríguez-



Figure 1. A Cuban Racer (*Cubophis cantherigerus*) ingesting the dry cadaver of an adult Cuban Treefrog (*Osteopilus septentrionalis*) at Finca La Chata, Boyeros Municipality, La Habana Province, Cuba (left); the desiccated carcass of the adult female Cuban Treefrog regurgitated by the Cuban Racer (right). Photographs by C. Hernández-Peraza.

Cabrera 2017; Rodríguez-Cabrera et al. 2016, 2018). Although the diet of this snake has been extensively reported, no records document consumption of carrion in nature.

We herein report for the first time necrophagy by a Cuban Racer. At 1100 h on 15 May 2026 in a small fragment of forest known as the “Shooting Field” in Finca La Chata, Parajón County, Capdevila, Boyeros Municipality, La Habana Province, Cuba (23.03352778, -82.38149722), we observed a Cuban Racer (SVL ~700 mm) that had almost totally swallowed a dry cadaver of an adult female Cuban Treefrog (*Osteopilus septentrionalis*) (SVL ~80 mm; Fig. 1). Presumably in response to our presence, the snake regurgitated its prey and quickly fled.

Scavenging snakes using olfactory cues appears to be a common strategy of prey acquisition for some species (DeVault and Krochmal 2002). Sazima and Strüssmann (1990) suggested that snakes that rely on chemosensory information to acquire prey might forage for carrion more frequently than those whose modes of prey acquisition are driven by visual cues. Studies both in nature and the laboratory on Brown Treesnakes and rattlesnakes have documented the importance of chemical cues when locating carrion (e.g., Cowles and Phelan 1958; Dullemeijer 1961; Gillingham and Baker 1981; Shivik et al. 2000).

This Cuban Racer might have used a combination of visual and chemical cues to locate the desiccated frog carcass. Cuban Racers are known to actively forage by day in search of prey (Henderson and Powell 2009). However, Gil and Rodríguez-Cabrera (2022) reported a *C. cantherigerus* attempting to swallow a Bar Jack (*Caranx ruber*) caught and stored by fishermen, suggesting that the consumption of carrion could be more common than previously thought. However, more field observations are necessary to confirm if our report constitutes a fortuitous case or a more common practice, especially when prey availability is low. Muszyńska et al. (2022) reported the consumption of carrion by *Natrix natrix* when more common prey species became scarce during a drought. The lack of information regarding necrophagy by snakes is surprising in light of the number of published papers documenting this behavior.

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