

**Predation of sea turtle eggs (*Lepidochelys*) by the snake
Loxocemus bicolor Cope***

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Resumen: Muy poco se conoce de la historia natural de la serpiente *Loxocemus bicolor* Cope. Se informa que esta especie incluye en su dieta huevos de la tortuga marina *Lepidochelys olivacea* Eschscholtz y se discute su comportamiento para depredarlos con base en observaciones hechas en Costa Rica.

In recent times the snake genus *Loxocemus* has been variously considered to belong to the Loxocemidae (McDowell, 1975), Boidae (Willard, 1977), Xenopeltinae (Dowling and Duellman, 1978) and Pythonidae (Alvarez del Toro, 1982). *Loxocemus bicolor* Cope, the only recognized species, occurs from Nayarith, México through northwestern Costa Rica on the Pacific coast of Middle America and in Chiapas, México and northeastern Honduras on the Atlantic (Nelson and Meyer, 1967). In Honduras it is known from sea level to an altitude of approximately 600 m where it is reported from Tropical Moist Forest, Tropical Dry Forest and Tropical Arid Forest formations (Wilson and Meyer, 1980). Scrub or thorny open forest occurs through most of its range where it has been found in rock piles, holes in the ground, under leaf litter, logs and the bark of logs (Nelson and Meyer, 1967) and occasionally abroad at night or on rainy days, as well as frequently inside ant hills, but primarily subterranean (Alvarez del Toro, 1982). The latter states that little or almost nothing is known of its habits.

One of us (Robinson) received a photograph of a snake emerging from a sea turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea* Eschscholtz) nest on Nancite Beach, Guanacaste Province, Costa Rica. The

snake was suspected of eating eggs or hatchlings and was inconclusively identified as *L. bicolor*.

On August 29th, 1983, at 6:30 p.m. after dusk on Ostional Beach, 90 km south of Nancite, in the same province, we observed a *L. bicolor* approximately 1.25 m in total length crawling through the sand. An *arribada* of perhaps several thousand *L. olivacea* was occurring at the time, with the turtles in various stages of nesting. The snake was observed for about one hour during which time it consumed three eggs. The first was encountered on the surface near a nest taken by poachers. The second was eaten within this same nest. The last was tossed in the vicinity of the snake together with a hermit crab but only the egg was taken. In each case the snake attempted various times to bite the egg and on succeeding, enveloped it with about two loops of the anterior third of its trunk using the method termed category 1 by Willard (1977) in which "The snake makes coils with its venter toward its own head". This pressure enabled the snake to pierce the egg, after which the entire egg was engulfed with little or no loss.

The snake continued probing until it was frightened by something and escaped.

Willard (1977) does not specify the prey item used in his experiments with *Loxocemus*. The distribution of this genus conforms well with that of sea turtles and large iguanid lizards whose eggs could well be, at least seasonally, a stable portion of its diet.

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