

NOTA

**RODENT CONSUMPTION BY
PHILODRYAS PSAMMOPHIDEA
(SERPENTES: COLUBRIDAE), FROM
THE INTER-ANDEAN DRY VALLEYS
OF CENTRAL BOLIVIA**

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The genus *Philodryas* (Wagler, 1830) is composed by opisthoglyphous snakes with terrestrial and diurnal habits, some may also be arboreal. They are medium to large hunters with thin bodies (Thomas, 1976; Ceï, 1993, López and Girauo, 2008). Widely distributed in South America, this genus includes 18 species (Zaher *et al.*, 2008), of which eight have been recorded in Bolivia (Aguayo, 2009).

These snakes feed on a wide variety of small vertebrates, such as lizards, anurans, snakes, birds and small mammals even bats (Thomas, 1976; Funk *et al.*, 2003; Lopez, 2003; Otto and Miller, 2004; Franca and Araujo, 2007). However, the feeding habits of only two species, *P. patagoniensis* and *P. olfersii*, have been described in detail (Hartmann and Marques, 2005; Lopez and Girauo, 2008; Leite *et al.*, 2009). In this sense, *P. psammophidea* is regarded a herpetophagous snake (Leynaud *et al.*, 2006; Aguayo *et al.*, 2007; Franca and Araujo, 2007).

In May 18, 2009 we found an adult female of *Philodryas psammophidea* (930 mm SVL), at a side of a crop field in the Tabacal valley (18°23'7.42" S – 64°38'7.88" W, 2015 m), Narciso Campero province southern Cochabamba, Bolivia. Ecologica-

lly, this valley belongs to the Inter-Andean Dry Forests of Bolivia (Ibisch and Merida, 2003). In the stomach of the snake probably killed by a settler, there was an adult female of *Graomys domorum* (Phyllotini; Sigmodontidae), a native rodent species widely distributed in the region. This rodent was ingested head-first recently, because there were no signs of decomposition. Both specimens were deposited in the vertebrate collection of the Centro de Biodiversidad y Genética (*P. psammophidea* CBG-700.; *G. domorum* CBG-405).

Despite *Philodryas* members are considered generalists predators, amphibians and reptiles constitute the most consumed preys, while birds and small mammals occur less frequently and have been reported in the diet of only five species of the genus (*P. aestiva*, *P. baroni*, *P. nattereri*, *P. olfersii*, *P. patagoniensis*) (Ceï, 1993; Franca and Araujo, 2007). Although *P. psammophidea* is fed with rodents in captivity (Scrocchi *et al.*, 2006), this is the first formal evidence of small mammals consumption by this snake in wild in Bolivia, and suggests a generalist diet for *P. psammophidea* as observed in other snakes of the genus.

On the other hand, it is known that the feeding habits of the two best-studied species of the genus, *P. olfersii* and *P. patagoniensis*, vary geographically in the dominance of prey types they consume and it has been proposed that such changes may be related to the increased prey availability or detectability, the snakes activity patterns or the phylogenetic relationships among them, instead of a resource preference pattern, as the most consumed prey do not constitute limited resources in the environment (Hartmann, 2001, Hartmann and Marques, 2005, Lopez and Girauo, 2008, Leite *et al.*, 2009).

Therefore, considering that rodents are apparently more abundant elements

compared with amphibians and lizards in the inter Andean dry valleys southern Cochabamba (Cahill *et al.*, 2010), *P. psammophidea* could be an important controller of rodents, mainly in those areas close to villages and crop fields where the higher abundances have been observed (D. A. Peñaranda, unpub. data).

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