SHORT COMMUNICATION

Dietary records for *Oxybelis rutherfordi* (Serpentes: Colubridae) from Trinidad and Tobago

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Snakes feed on a variety of prey (Greene 1983). The diet of the Brown Vine Snake, Oxybelis aeneus (Wagler, 1824), is well known; lizards are the most common prey. This species has no apparent taxonomic proclivity in its dietary choices, which suggests that their selection of lizards is random (Mesquita et al. 2012, Sousa et al. 2020). However, reports on the diet of Rutherford's Vine Snake, Oxvbelis rutherfordi Jadin, Blair, Orlofske, Jowers, Rivas, Vitt, Ray, Smith, and Murphy, 2020, are limited (Murphy et al. 2013) and usually lack the specific identity of the prey (Murphy et al. 2018). Herein we provide a list of previously undocumented prey records for O. rutherfordi from the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in the West Indies.

Oxybelis rutherfordi is arboreal and occurs across northern South America, including the

islands of Trinidad and Tobago (Jadin *et al.* 2020). Jadin *et al.* (2019) recognized that *O. rutherfordi* is distinct from *O. aeneus* and described the species (Jadin*et al.* 2020). Because previous natural history information for *O. rutherfordi* was combined with *O. aeneus* (Murphy *et al.* 2018), it is appropriate to provide new information for *O. rutherfordi*.

Three separate predation events by *O. rutherfordi* were observed in January and February 2021 involving three lizard species on Trinidad. The encounter with each predation event was fortuitous. All occurred in the afternoon—one on Trinidad and two on different days on the island of Chacachacare, northwest of Trinidad (Figure 1). We observed each event for approximately 1 or 2 min to minimize disturbance of the snake and avoid it regurgitating the prey. Photographs were taken at approximate distances 1–3 m (Figure 2). Lizard prey species were identified using Murphy *et al.* (2018).

All predation events involved adult *Oxybelis rutherfordi*. The first took place in D'Abadie, an urban residential area in north central Trinidad

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Figure 1. Location of predation events by *Oxybelis rutherfordi* in Trinidad in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Chacachacare Island's location is shown with the oval; D'Abadie's location is indicated by the triangle, and the location of Nariva Swamp by the square. Map created using QGIS (version 3.10.2) with OpenStreetMap feature.

(10.6992 N, -61.3069 W), at 15:25 h on 25 January 2021. The snake preyed on an adult female *Gonatodes vittatus* (Lichtenstein and Martens, 1856) in a potted plant less than 1 m off the ground. The second event occurred at about 13:45 h on 31 January 2021 on Chacachacare Island (10.6844 N, -61.7555 W) in clearings along the forest edge, where we observed *O. rutherfordi* preying on an adult *Gymnophthalmus* sp. on the ground in an area of scrub vegetation 20 m from the coastline. Two species of *Gymnophthalmus* occur on Chacachacare Island (Murphy *et al.* 2018), but without examining the specimen in hand, it is difficult to distinguish between them.

The third predation event also took place on Chacachacare Island (10.6831 N, -61.7548 W) in a forest-edge clearing at 14:30 h on 13 February 2021 about 30 m from the location of the second event. The snake was preying on an adult female *Cnemidophorus lemniscatus* (Linnaeus, 1758) on the ground in a partially open canopy area with scrub vegetation. This may have been the same snake as the previous observation given the proximity of the location. Though we did not observe the initial capture of any of the lizard prey, each event took place on the ground or within 1 m above the ground, suggesting that *O. rutherfordi* descended to the ground to capture the



lizards, all of which are terrestrial (Murphy et al. 2018).

In addition to these three observations, one of us (RJA) came across a photograph of an adult Oxybelis rutherfordi preying on an adult Anolis planiceps (Troschel, 1848) in Trinidad. The photographer is unknown; only the general location of the event is known-a forested area in Nariva Swamp, Trinidad, on 27 February 2021 during the day. This predation event is not surprising because the distributions of O. rutherfordi and A. planiceps overlap (Murphy et al. 2018). Based on the four lizard prey species reported here, and a record of predation on Copeoglossum aurae Hedges and Conn, 2012 (Murphy et al. 2013), O. rutherfordi feeds on at least five species of lizards from five families, suggesting that lizards probably are a staple of their diet, resembling the dietary habits of O. aeneus (Mesquita et al. 2012).

As citizen scientists, our natural history observations contribute to a better understanding of the ecology of Oxybelis ruthrfordi, and reinforce the concept that citizen scientists with minimal training can provide useful ecological data (Auguste 2020). We anticipate that additional predation events by O. rutherfordi will be observed, given the widespread distribution of the species across the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

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Figure 2. The lizards Gonatodes vittatus (female) (A), *Gymnophthalmus* sp. (**B**), and *Cnemidophorus* lemniscatus (female) (C) being preyed upon by Oxybelis rutherfordi. Photos: K. E. (A), J.-M. M. (B), and M.-E. M. (C).

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