

SCIENTIFIC COMMUNICATION

Defensive behavior of the green snake *Philodryas viridissimus* (Linnaeus) (Colubridae, Reptilia) from the Atlantic Forest in Northeastern Brazil

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The green snake *Philodryas viridissimus* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Colubridae) is diurnal, arboreal and inhabits rain forests in South America (DIXON & SOINI 1977). Here I report on the defensive displays of an individual from the Atlantic forest near Porto Seguro (16°26'S, 39°05'W), Bahia, northeastern Brazil. The specimen (male, snout-vent length = 790 mm, tail = 290 mm) was preserved as voucher in the Instituto Butantan collection (IB 57195).

After its capture the snake was kept on a branch in the field and I elicited its defensive behavior by approaching and touching it. The defensive display includes lateral compression of the body, S-coil posture, open mouth, and striking (Fig. 1).

Lateral compression display is found among several arboreal snakes (GREENE 1979) but is unusual, if present, in other species of *Philodryas* (SAZIMA & HADDAD 1992). The genus *Philodryas* includes both arboreal and terrestrial species (VITT 1980; SAZIMA & HADDAD 1992). The green coloration, extreme angulation of the ventral scales and the lack of sexual dimorphism in tail length of *P. viridissimus* (FOWLER & SALOMÃO 1994) suggest that this snake is one of the most arboreal species within the genus *Philodryas*. Thus, it is plausible that the defensive display with lateral compression of *P. viridissimus* is a derived trait associated to arboreality (*cf.* GREENE 1979).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS. I thank M. Martins and I. Sazima who reviewed the manuscript.

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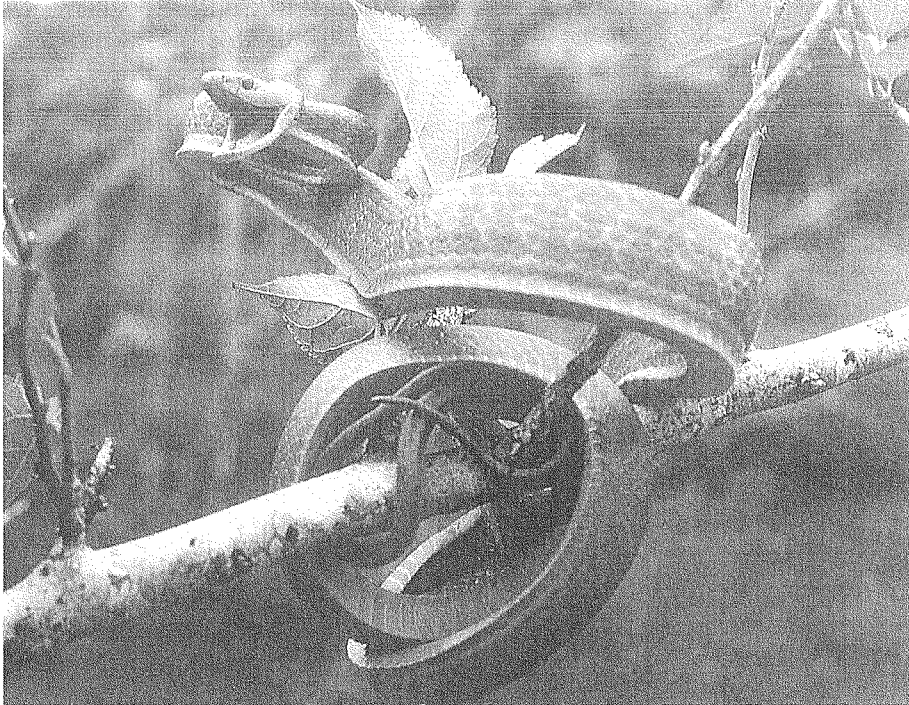


Fig. 1. Defensive display of *Philodryas viridissimus*. Note the protruding angulation of the ventrals scales due to lateral compression of the body.

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Recebido em 31.X.1997; aceito em 01.III.1999.