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A contribution to our knowledge of the false coral snake's (*Lampropeltis triangulum*, Lacépède 1788) diet

José Luis Aguilar-López* and Eduardo Pineda

Lampropeltis triangulum (false coral snake) is one of the most widely distributed snakes in the Americas, occurring from southern Ontario and Quebec in Canada, to Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela in South America. It lives in a variety of environments, from dry lowlands, to tropical and subtropical regions in premontane and montane areas at low elevations, and its elevation distribution ranges from sea level to 1650 m a.s.l. (Lee, 1996).

This species varies greatly in size and coloration, presumably as a result of its adaptation to different climates, ecosystems and communities across its wide distribution (Smith and Stephens, 2003). Its coloration, though variable, is based on a pattern of red, black and yellow rings around the entire body. *Lampropeltis triangulum* is mostly crepuscular and nocturnal but occasionally some individuals, especially small individuals, are active during the day (Campbell, 1998). *Lampropeltis triangulum* is a terrestrial snake that kills by constriction, its diet consisting of a variety of prey items including insects, worms, spiders (Smith, 1956), birds and bird eggs (Rodríguez and Drummond, 2000), lizards (such as *Cnemidophorus angusticeps*, *Eumeces fasciatus* and *Eumeces obsoletus*) (Ashton and Smith, 1999; Fitch and Fleet, 1970), iguanas and lizard eggs (Rodríguez and Drummond, 2000; Fitch, 1999), small snakes (including *Arizona elegans*, *Diadophis punctatus* and *Carphophis vermis*), frogs (Fitch and Fleet, 1970; Cotten et al., 1998) and small mammals. Its prey varies depending on the region and apparently also in importance. Lee (1996) mentioned that the diet in the Yucatan region of Mexico is mostly composed of small mammals, among which several species shrew have been identified. For example, in USA the shrews *Blarina brevicauda*, *Cryptotis noitai* and *C. parva* have been reported as the prey of *L. triangulum* (Fitch and Fleet, 1970; Williams, 1988), while in Mexico (in Hidalgo state) *Sorex saussurei* has been identified as prey (Mendoza-Quijano and Ruiz-Piña, 1995) and in Guatemala, *Cryptotis* sp. (Campbell, 1998).

On 3 May 2011 an individual male of *L. triangulum* was collected in a cloud forest fragment in the Francisco Javier Clavijero natural reserve, located on the southwestern edge of Xalapa city, Veracruz, Mexico (19.513685 N, 96.943049 W) at an elevation of 1340 m a.s.l. The specimen, found around 0900 h and active in the plant litter, was captured, transported to a laboratory and placed in a container, where it later regurgitated a shrew that was in a slight state of decomposition. The prey was identified as *Cryptotis parva* (least shrew) (Fig. 1). The snout-vent length of the *L. triangulum* specimen was 41.9 mm and the tail was 5.6 mm long, suggesting that it was an adult. This represents the first report of predator-prey interaction between *L. triangulum* and *C. parva* in Mexico and the second record of a shrew species identified as the prey of a false coral snake in the country. In the northeastern state of Kansas, in the USA, more than 2100 km to the north of the locality reported here, Fitch and Fleet (1970) also reported *C.*

Figure 1. *Lampropeltis triangulum* with its freshly regurgitated *Cryptotis parva* prey.

Red de Biología y Conservación de Vertebrados, Instituto de Ecología, A.C.
Carretera antigua a Coatepec No. 351, El Haya, Xalapa, Veracruz, México.
*Correspondence author; e-mail: jlal.herp@gmail.com

parva as prey of *L. triangulum*, but in a prairie grassland and at a much lower elevation (270 m a.s.l.). This suggests that when the two species coexist in a given locality, biological interaction is maintained regardless of differences in environmental attributes, vegetation type, elevation or historical events.

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