

# EXTENSION OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF *EUNECTES MURINUS* (LINNAEUS, 1758) AND *HELICOPS ANGULATUS* (LINNAEUS, 1758) IN VENEZUELA, WITH NOTES ON OPHIOPHAGIA

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The anaconda (*Eunectes murinus* Linnaeus, 1758) and the brown-banded water snake (*Helicops angulatus* Linnaeus, 1758) are relatively common semi-aquatic snakes that share much of their geographical distribution across the Amazonas and Orinoco river basins (Peters and Orejas-Miranda 1970). In Venezuela, both species are sympatric, and even syntopic in some areas (Roze 1966, Staton and Dixon 1977, Lancini 1979, Hoogmoed 1979, and Gorzula and Señaris 1999).

On 1 September 2006, an Anaconda was collected by local villagers in the headwaters of the river Cabrutica, a tributary of the Orinoco River, at coordinates 8°30'31.2"N and 64°52'14.8"W: at 171 m.a.s.l. in San Tomé District, south of Anzoátegui state in Venezuela (Museo de Biología de la Universidad Central de Venezuela, MBUCV-III-7189). The snake was among riparian vegetation, characterized by a moderately influx of turbid water 3 m wide and 0.5 to 1.5 m in depth, with silt-bottomed clay and many trunks and branches. This is the first record for the state and increases the species distribution approximately 126 km east of the nearest known locality, Espino (Guárico state) (Roze 1966). The specimen is an immature female, with a total length of 970 mm and a 145 mm tail. Its scale counts falls between the ranges given by Roze (1966) and Lancini (1979). During its capture, the anaconda regurgitated a partially digested *Helicops angulatus* (MBUCV-III-7189) swallowed headfirst. To our knowledge, this is the first record of ophiophagia for anaconda in Venezuela. The anaconda prey on a variety of vertebrates like fishes, reptiles, birds, and large size mammals (Rivas, Molina and Avila 1998, Martins and Oliveira 1999, Gorzula and Señaris 1999, Valderrama and Thorbjarnarson 2001, Rivas 2004). Although anacondas are not typically ophiophagic, some females ingest males after mating in natural conditions (Rivas and Owens 2000). The wide range of prey items, as well as occasional attacks on humans (Rivas 1999), suggest that anaconda is a generalist species in its feeding habits.

*Eunectes murinus* has been mentioned in Venezuela for the States of Amazonas, Apure, Bolívar, Delta Amacuro, Sucre and Zulia (Roze 1966, McDiarmid and Paolillo 1988, Rivas and Oliveros 1998, Molina *et al.* 2004), while *Helicops angulatus* is distributed in the states of Amazonas, Apure, Bolívar, Monagas, Delta Amacuro, Sucre and Portuguesa (Roze 1966, Staton and Dixon 1977, Rivas and Oliveros 1997, Gorzula and Señaris 1999, Molina *et al.* 2004). In this work we report for the first time the presence of both species in Anzoátegui state, that, although Lancini and Kornacker (1989) included in a distribution map south of this State, lacked museum records for the species (Roze 1966). Another record of *Helicops angulatus* for Anzoátegui state is documented by a photograph of a specimen (Fig. 1) taken at Caño San Lorenzo, a small river near the town of San Pablo (09°46'N, 65°03'W) northwest Anzoátegui state. This record is located 239 km west and 145 km northeast of the closest previous localities for the species, Caripito and Espino (Monagas and Guárico states, respectively) (Roze 1966). Given the known geographic distribution for *E. murinus* and *H. angulatus* in Venezuela, we presume that both species may be present in the lowlands of central and southern Monagas state.

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FIG. 1. Specimen of *Helicops angulatus* from Anzoátegui State, Venezuela. Photo by M. Natera-Mumaw.

*Ejemplar de Helicops angulatus del estado Anzoátegui, Venezuela. Foto por M. Natera-Mumaw.*

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