

**PARTIAL ALBINISM IN A VENEZUELAN
SPECIMEN OF FALSE CORAL SNAKE,
OXYRHOPUS PETOLA PETOLA (Linnaeus, 1758)**

- ☐ Taxonomía / Taxonomy
☐ Biogeografía / Biogeography
☐ Ecología / Ecology
☒ Historia Natural / Natural History

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Several neotropical snake species of the family Colubridae have been reported with anomalous phenetic color expressions, such as albinism. The later has been reported as complete, leucistic, or even as irido-, xanthic-, erythro- or pinto- albinism (Da Silva *et al.* 1999, Dyrkacz 1981, Hoge and Belluomini 1957, Miranda *et al.* 1986, Nicéforo-María 1958, and Villa and Rivas 1971). We here report the first record of albinism for *Oxyrhopus petola*, although this appears to be the second for the genus, since complete albinism has been reported for *Oxyrhopus gubei* (see Amaral 1927, and Sazima and Di Bernardo 1991).

On 18 September 1996, at 17:00 h, the veterinary Nestor Jáuregui collected an *Oxyrhopus petola* on the road from Orope to Colón, Municipio Colón, in the Venezuelan Táchira State. The specimen, having a total length of 650 mm, was found injured on a paved road, having a ventral cut and with the intestines out. The almost dying animal underwent surgery and then it was transported for recovery to the "Centro Universitario Herpetológico Forestal", the University Herpetological Center at the Faculty of Forestry and Environmental Sciences of the Universidad de Los Andes in Mérida city. There, the specimen was held in captivity for three years, being feed with mice (*Mus musculus*), lizards (*Cnemidophorus lemniscatus* and *Mabuya meridensis*) and frogs (*Mannophryne collaris*). While in captivity, the animal never lost his partial albinistic condition. Upon decease, it was deposited under the catalog number ULABG 4052, in the Collection of Amphibians and Reptiles of the Laboratory of Biogeography, School of Geography of the Universidad de Los Andes at Mérida city. The natural habitat surrounding the place of capture of this specimen was expected to be a piedmont humid forest ("Bosque Húmedo Tropical" in the Holdridge's Lize Zone classification by Ewel *et al.* (1976); instead, the actual conditions were those of an intervened place with cattle pastures and agriculture.

The usual pattern of coloration of *Oxyrhopus petola petola* is one with dorsal bands, suggesting open rings, alternating pale and dark bands. The dark bands are always black, while the pale bands are pink, red, yellow, yellowish, white or a combination of some of these (Roze 1966). The specimen ULABG 4052 had some integumentary pigment (including eyes): red dorsal bands, of 1-2 scales in width, venter creamish-white, red eyes, head creamish-white without color blotches. According to this coloration, the animal could therefore be considered as a partial albino with erythrophores (Dyrkacz *op. cit.*). The nocturnal habits of this species, along with the large adult size of this partial albinist specimen, corroborate the contention of Sazima and Di Bernardo (1991) that these color variations occur with more frequency in nocturnal or fossorial animals, that theoretically are less dependant on camouflage to survive.

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FIG. 1. Partial albinistic *Oxyrhopus petola petola* from Táchira State, Venezuela.

Oxyrhopus petola petola parcialmente albina del Estado Táchira, Venezuela.

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