A New Trophic Resource in the Diet of the Saw-tailed Curlytail, *Leiocephalus carinatus* (Squamata: Leiocephalidae) in Cuba

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The Saw-scaled Curlytail (*Leiocephalus carinatus*) is a polymorphic species distributed in the Bahamas, Cuba, and the Cayman and Swan Islands, and which has been introduced in southeastern Florida (Henderson and Powell 2009). In Cuba, the species is widespread (Rodríguez-Schettino et al. 2013) and common, inhabiting rocky coasts, “mogotes” (peculiar limestone outcrops in western Cuba), and areas near human settlements around old buildings and roadsides (Rodríguez-Schettino 1999). This very cautious, diurnally active lizard exhibits an agility that belies its stocky build. In Cuba, males reach snout-vent lengths of 98.5–109.1 mm and females 90.9–100.9 mm (Rodríguez-Schettino 1999).

The trophic spectrum of this species is very wide. It feeds on many invertebrates, including insects and arachnids (Sampedro et al. 1979; Schoener et al. 1982; de Armas 1987; Fong and García 2002), centipedes (Sampedro et al. 1979; de Armas 1987), crustaceans (de Armas 1987), and snails (Sampedro et al. 1979). It also consumes small vertebrates, and both cannibalism and heterospecific saurophagy have been reported (Schoener et al. 1982; de Armas 1987; Martínez and Rodríguez-Schettino 1987; Fong and García 2002). In addition, these lizards consume vegetable material (Sampedro et al. 1979; Schoener et al. 1982; de Armas 1987; Fong and García 2002), mainly fruits (Sampedro et al. 1979). Fong and García (2002) found shed skin in the alimentary bolus, which is common for lizards (e.g., Perera 1985; de Armas 1987; Martínez and Fernández 1994; Sifers et al. 2001). Individuals also have been reported eating food for animals kept in the Havana Zoological Park and cooked chicken eggs (Rodríguez-Schettino 1999). Martínez and Moreno (2003) observed individuals “consuming sweets and remains of human food at tourist places, gardens, and yards of houses” (translated from Spanish), but they did not specify what type of food. Herein we report the exploitation of a new, human-made trophic resource.

On 20 February 2012, at 0931 h at the biological station in the Protected Area “Varahicacos” (23.19457 N, -81.15384 W; NAD27), on the Hicacos Peninsula, Matanzas Province, an adult male *Leiocephalus carinatus* was photographed feeding on discarded rice and black beans (a dish called *congri* in Cuba; Fig. 1). The lizard approached the food carefully, with tail raised and curled, and apparently very much aware of the camera (Fig. 1A). Nevertheless, it quickly began to eat (Fig. 1B). Food recognition appeared initially to be by sight, possibly also by scent once at close range, and finally by taste and texture as indicated by use of the tongue, which was slightly protruded (Fig. 1A).

Arthropod abundance varies seasonally in tropical environments (i.e., more abundant during the rainy season; Wolda 1980; Tanaka and Tanaka 1982). This could result in limited energy availability for insectivorous reptiles, especially during the dry season when food and water are scarce, potentially triggering behaviors like those reported herein. However, we have no evidence of *L. carinatus* rejecting this kind of food during the rainy season. A more parsimonious explanation is that *L. carinatus* is an omnivorous, opportunistic species that exploits whatever resources are available in order to obtain the greatest amount of energy with the least possible expense. Consumption of immobile, energetically rich food like rice and beans would appear to be an ideal scenario, the probability of which is enhanced by the frequently reported association of this species with humans.

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Literature Cited


Fig. 1. An adult male Saw-scaled Curlytail (*Leiocephalus carinatus*) in Varahicacos, Cuba approaching (A) and eating (B) rice and black beans (a dish called *congrí* in Cuba). Photographs by Raimundo López-Silvero.


