



Attempted Saurophagy and Cannibalism in Gaige’s Rainbow Lizard, *Cnemidophorus* cf. *gaigei* (Squamata: Teiidae), in an Urban Area near the Colombian Caribbean Coast

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Inter- and intraspecific predation in South American lizards, which includes both saurophagy and cannibalism, is an increasingly documented phenomenon (Oliveira et al. 2025). These behaviors, often considered opportunistic strategies, play an important role in the population dynamics of various species. Although saurophagy and cannibalism are infrequently observed in natural (as opposed to human-altered) habitats, their occurrence is being recorded with increasing regularity (Pergentino et al. 2017; Sevilla-Sánchez et al. 2019; González-Acosta et al. 2023).

The genus *Cnemidophorus* is widely distributed in Central and South America, including a number of offshore islands (Midtgaard 2025; Uetz et al. 2025). Species are diurnally active and capable of rapid movement (e.g., Donoso-Barros 1960). These lizards are dietary generalists known to prey on a variety of invertebrates and small vertebrates as well as plant material, such as flowers, fruits, and seeds (e.g., Montgomery et al. 2011).

We herein document for the first time attempted intra-specific predation in what we tentatively identify as Gaige’s Rainbow Lizard (*Cnemidophorus* cf. *gaigei*) (Fig. 1). Despite

the fact that the paravertebral stripes remained parallel in the pelvic and sacral regions (i.e., they did not come into contact), we chose to avoid a more positive identification, largely because the species’ distribution has not been accurately defined (Harvey et al. 2012; A.C. Montes Correa, in litt., 3 May 2025). When initially observed at about 1500 h on 17 April 2024, during an incidental encounter in an urban area of the La Campiña Sector, Sincelejo Municipality, Sucre Department, Colombia (9.288611-75.388611), what appeared to be a subadult male had grasped a conspecific juvenile by its head. We did not witness complete ingestion, as the predator fled out of view with its prey, but suggest that this event represented opportunistic behavior, likely influenced by habitat alteration due to terrain transformation and human presence (Montgomery et al. 2011). Urban habitats, where the availability of natural prey is limited, could increase the likelihood of saurophagy, which has been observed in *Tropidurus hispidus* (Salcedo et al. 2022), and likely cannibalism, as described herein. Environmental conditions at the time of the event included extreme heat, which has been suggested as a factor that increased aggressiveness and favored



Figure 1. Attempted saurophagy and cannibalism by a subadult male Gaige’s Rainbow Lizard (*Cnemidophorus* cf. *gaigei*). Photographs by Luis A. Olivera.

predatory behavior in species of *Tropidurus* (Cunha Passos et al. 2016).

Oliveira et al. (2025) documented 127 records of saurophagy in 47 species in nine families of lizards. Although no prior records exist for species of *Cnemidophorus*, the apparent frequency of saurophagy, especially in extreme (e.g., urban) conditions, suggests that lizards turn to conspecifics when other prey are scarce (Oliveira et al. 2025). Those observations, augmented by the event described herein, highlight the need for further studies to better understand how human activities can affect the natural behaviors of species.

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