

# NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

## GYMNOPHIONA — CAECILIANS

**SCHISTOMETOPUM THOMENSE** (São Tomé Caecilian). **PRE-DATION.** The caecilian *Schistometopum thomense* is endemic to the island of São Tomé, Central Africa. Its unusual bright yellow coloration makes it a familiar animal, locally known as ‘cobra-bobo’ (Measey and Van Dongen 2006. *Evol. Ecol. Res.* 8:1049–1059). This species has a wide distribution including anthropogenic habitats but little has been reported on the natural history of *S. thomense* in its natural environment (Nussbaum and Pfrender 1998. *Misc. Publ. Mus. Zool., Univ. Michigan* 187). Herein we report a direct observation of an adult domestic Muscovy Duck (*Cairina moschata*) predating on an adult *S. thomense*, the first predation record for this species. At 0630, 31 Oct 2012, we observed a domestic Muscovy Duck attempting to swallow a bright yellow *S. thomense* at the entrance of the main group of houses of the locality of Água Sampaio (00.3513°N, 06.6049°W), district of Lobata, São Tomé Island. The duck had already approximately half of the body length of the caecilian in its beak and unsuccessfully attempted to swallow it for about 30 seconds. The duck then carried the amphibian to a puddle of water where, with the help of this liquid, it finally managed to swallow the caecilian. We occasionally observed the duck during the next few hours in which it seemed to be unaffected and behaving normally. This report casts doubt on the hypothesis that the unusually bright coloration of *S. thomense* is aposematic and thus that the skin of *S. thomense* is toxic (Hofer 1998. *Herpetozoa* 11:37–46).

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## CAUDATA — SALAMANDERS

**AMBYSTOMA BISHOPI** (Reticulated Flatwoods Salamander). **EGG SURVIVAL AFTER FIRE.** Reticulated Flatwoods Salamanders are endemic to the fire-maintained Longleaf Pine (*Pinus palustris*)/Wiregrass (*Aristida stricta*) ecosystem of the South-eastern Coastal Plain of the United States. Adults migrate to ephemeral wetlands during fall and early winter (Palis 1997. *J. Herpetol.* 31:71–78), and females lay eggs on the ground before the wetland basin fills with water. Larvae develop within terrestrially deposited eggs, often for several weeks or months, and hatch upon inundation from winter rains (Anderson and Williamson 1976. *Herpetologica* 32:4–22; Pierson Hill, Florida State Univ., pers. com.; Kelly Jones, pers. obs.; Sylvia Powell, pers. obs.).

We observed live *Ambystoma bishopi* eggs in wetlands with dry basins from late December 2011 to late-February 2012 on Eglin Air Force Base, Okaloosa Co., Florida, USA. The fall-winter season was characterized by low rainfall, and the majority of the eggs we monitored were not inundated and did not hatch successfully. Most, but not all, of the monitored eggs were dead by late-February.

On 3 January 2012, B. Rincon found a group of at least six live eggs on the ground sheltered above by herbaceous plants (including the dead basal leaves of *Eriocaulon compressum* and a rosette of *Dichanthelium* sp.). Embryos visible within the eggs exhibited tails with bright skin coloration (Harrison stage between 35 and 45; Harrison 1969. *Organization and Development of the Embryo*. Yale Univ. Press, New Haven, Connecticut). Additional eggs might have been obscured behind others, because the egg deposition site was a recess of soil and vegetation (< 5cm deep), and we tried not to disturb the eggs.



FIG. 1. View of the area where *Ambystoma bishopi* eggs were laid as seen the day after a fire passed over the area. Living eggs were located here after the prescribed burn of the wetland, which occurred on 22 February 2012 in Okaloosa Co., Florida, USA.