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Thamnophis proximus (Western Ribbon snake) Arboreal Behavior

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THAMNOPHIS PROXIMUS (Western Ribbon snake). **ARBOREAL BEHAVIOR.** Many species that are considered terrestrial will intermittently exploit habitats outside of their typical habitat. Even though terrestrial, *Thamnophis* spp. have been found to use arboreal basking locations, either commonly as in *T. sauritus* (Eastern Ribbonsnake) (Langford et al. 2011. Herpetol. Conserv. Biol. 6:400–409) or occasionally for thermoregulation, as in *T. sirtalis parietalis* (Red-sided Garter snake) (Shine et al. 2005. J. Therm. Biol. 30:179–185). However, there are no records to document this behavior in *T. proximus*.

On 13 March 2015 (0900 h) at Evariste Nunez Woods and Bird Sanctuary (Cameron Parish, Louisiana; 29.73857°N, 92.8373139°W, WGS 84) we observed a *T. proximus* basking ca. 1.5 m up in a young *Quercus virginiana* (Live Oak; Fig. 1) located along an edge between maintained grassland (mowed) and coastal Chenier forest; presumably, this location was ideal to thermoregulate during the spring. The surrounding Chenier had some standing water from recent precipitation events, but there was no precipitation immediately prior to the observation, which has been found to elicit arboreal basking in *T. s. parietalis* (Shine et al., *op. cit.*). Tinkle (1957. Ecology 38:69–77) found that most *T. proximus* basked in *Rubus* (blackberry) and *Typha* (cattail) mats; when shade increased with leaf out during the course of the year, individuals moved to different areas instead of moving up trees within the same habitat. However, the use of small trees for basking or foraging might be more common than represented in the literature.



FIG. 1. *Thamnophis proximus* basking in young tree in Louisiana, USA.

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THAMNOPHIS SIRTALIS (Common Gartersnake). **DIET / SCAVENGING.** Occasional consumption of carrion in the wild is known in *Thamnophis sirtalis*, but interspecific competition over carrion has not been previously reported. Markezich (2010. Herpetol. Rev. 41:99–100) recently reviewed six records for scavenging in *T. sirtalis* and added two more. We provide additional reports of *T. sirtalis* scavenging, and suggest that scavenging may be a deliberate foraging strategy in this species (DeVault and Krochmal 2002. Herpetologica 58:429–436). The widespread availability of road kills is a relatively recent phenomenon from an evolutionary perspective. There are advantages to highly plastic foraging behaviors that can exploit new food resources (Krause and Burghardt 2001. Herpetol. Monogr. 15:100–123). Scavenging on roadways may be especially successful during periods of concentrated amphibian migrations that result in many road kills. Whether or not this is an advantageous survival strategy is questionable, however, as snakes are also likely to experience higher mortality when foraging along roadways.

On 3 September 1994, JBL observed a *T. sirtalis* attempting to consume a deceased *Lithobates pipiens* (Northern Leopard Frog) in the middle of a paved road in Scott Co., Minnesota, USA (ca. 5 km SW of Shakopee; 44.752951°N, 93.595761°W, WGS 84). The road-killed frog was planate, desiccated, and firmly adhered to the road surface. The snake was preoccupied due to the difficulty of removing the frog from the road, and appeared to be unaware of its immediate surroundings. No attempt to flee was made upon approach and the snake was relocated to a roadside ditch, but quickly returned and resumed its effort to dislodge the frog. JBL observed another *T. sirtalis* attempting to consume a deceased adult *Cardinalis cardinalis* (Northern Cardinal) in Muscatine Co., Iowa, USA, on 14 April 2001 (Swamp White Oak Preserve ca. 5 km NE of Conesville; 41.405973°N, 91.304328°W, WGS 84). The bird was decomposed to the point of desiccation, light in weight, and much larger than the snake (457 mm total length). The snake unsuccessfully attempted to dislodge the carcass from vegetation by pulling on it while the snake's posterior region was anchored in a small burrow for leverage. After ca. 5 min, the snake released its hold on the bird, fully emerged from the burrow and rested in the sun ca. 76 cm away from the carcass. On 19 July 1995, JCG observed a large female *T. sirtalis* (SVL = 840 mm SVL; tail length = 147 mm; 305 g without prey) with a large bolus at midbody in the northwest corner of Miller's Marsh not far from West Side Drive on Beaver Island, Charlevoix Co., in northern Lake Michigan, Michigan, USA (45.613397°N, 85.593722°W, WGS 84). The snake was captured and with gentle palpation a young (113 g) *Lepus americanus* (Snowshoe Hare) was regurgitated and preserved (deposited at Central Michigan University Museum of Cultural and Natural History). Examination of the hare revealed it to have a crushed skull, indicating that it had probably been killed by an automobile and then scavenged postmortem. Finally, at 2200 h (CST) on 14 June 1994, GSC observed an adult *T. sirtalis* in a tug-of-war with a *Carabus nemoralis* (European Ground Beetle) over a piece of carrion (a ca. 6 cm long frog limb, likely *Lithobates clamitans* or *L. pipiens*) on a rural gravel road in Forest Co., Wisconsin, USA (Berry Lane ca. 45 m E of Hemlock Creek; 45.479739°N, 88.876267°W, WGS 84). The beetle had one end of the carrion clamped in its mandibles while being dragged by the snake, its feet leaving furrows in the sandy road surface. The tug-of-war was observed for 1–2 min.; upon closer approach, the snake disengaged and fled, leaving the beetle with the carrion. The beetle was deposited at FMNH (determined by Robin Delapena). These observations lend support to the importance