

An Attack on a Human by a Green Anaconda (*Eunectes murinus*)

Marcelo R. Duarte¹, S. M. Almeida-Santos¹ and J. L. Cardoso²

136

Large constricting snakes are potentially dangerous to people due to their size and strength (Branch and Hacke, 1980; Murphy and Henderson, 1997; Rivas, 1998). *Eunectes murinus* is a species with a wide geographic distribution in South America (Henderson et al., 1995). This snake is rarely seen away from water and it is found in a great variety of aquatic habitats (Strimple, 1993). It has been considered the largest snake in the world (Murphy and Henderson, 1997). During 33 years (1966–1999), the Hospital Vital Brazil in Instituto Butantan, São Paulo, Brazil, recorded four cases of bites caused by *Eunectes*, from a total of 79,699 bites registered. Three of them happened in captivity and the victims were bitten in the hands while handling the snakes.

In this note we describe an attack against a human by *E. murinus*. The 38-year-old man (75 kg, 1.70 m) had been fishing for approximately 5 minutes, in waist-deep water, on the evening on 27 July 1999, near a river bank in the city of Pereira Barreto, state of São Paulo, Brazil (20°38'S, 51°07'W). Suddenly a female snake (310 cm snout-vent

length, 50 cm tail length, 15.2 kg body mass) emerged from the water and bit the man on the thigh, entwining his legs. The victim called out for help and his friends grabbed the snake body releasing the snake jaws from the leg. The patient suffered several tooth punctures on the left thigh, which resulted in discrete edema. In Brazil field attacks by *E. murinus* have been recorded since 1852 (Bates, 1979) and more recently an attack was reported by *E. notaeus* (yellow anaconda) (Strüssmann, 1997). This attack may have been another case of "mistaken identity" similar to that described by William W. Lamar in 1978 in the field against a biologist (see Murphy and Henderson, 1997). Although fatal attacks caused by *Eunectes* have never been registered in the scientific literature, one could never predict what would have happened in this case if the victim had not been helped, since some predatory attacks have been attributed to this species in Venezuela (Rivas, 1998).

Acknowledgment

We thank Dr. M. G. Salomão for comments and suggestions.

Literature Cited

- Bates, H. W. 1979. Um naturalista no Rio Amazonas. Itatiaia/EDUSP, Belo Horizonte/São Paulo.
- Branch, W. R., and D. Hacke. 1980. A fatal attack on a young boy by an African rock python, *Python sebae*. J. Herpetology 14(3):305-307.
- Henderson, R. W., T. W. P. Micucci, G. Puerto and R. W. Bourgeois. 1995. Ecological correlates and patterns in the distribution of Neotropical boines (Serpentes: Boidae): A preliminary assessment. Herpetological Natural History 3(1):15-27.
- Murphy, J. C., and R. W. Henderson. 1997. Tales of giant snakes: A historical natural history of anacondas and pythons. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company.
- Rivas, J. A. 1998. Predatory attacks of green anacondas (*Eunectes murinus*) on adult human beings. Herpetological Natural History 6(2):157-159.
- Strimple, P. D. 1993. Overview of the natural history of the green anaconda (*Eunectes murinus*). Herpetological Natural History 1(1):25-35.
- Strüssmann, C. 1997. Hábitos alimentares da sucuri-amarela, *Eunectes notaeus* Cope, 1862, no pantanal matogrossense. Biociências 5(1):35-52.

1. Laboratório de Herpetologia, Instituto Butantan, Av. Vital Brazil, 1500, São Paulo, SP, Brazil, 05503-900.
2. Hospital Vital Brazil, Instituto Butantan, Av. Vital Brazil, 1500, São Paulo, SP, Brazil, 05503-900.