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**AMPHISBAENA ALBA** (Worm Lizard): DEFENSIVE BEHAVIOUR. *Amphisbaena alba* (Linnaeus, 1758) occurs in forested lowlands of South America, from Panama through Venezuela, Trinidad, and the Guyana; Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia eastern the Andes; Brazil and northern Paraguay (Gans, 2005). It shows fossorial habits and diet that comprises varied arthropods and their larvae, and occasionally some vertebrates, such as small rodents and lizards (Colli & Zamboni, 1999).

This report describes for the first time the defensive behavior of an *A. alba* (approximately 400 mm total length) in nature under predatory circumstances.

The specimen was found in Santa Rosa Farm, district of Curvelo-MG (18°45'S 44°25'W), and observed in January 2008, at about 8:30 a.m. crossing a lawn. The worm lizard was noticed by some chickens and a rooster (*Gallus* sp.) which attacked it, pecking its body randomly (Fig. 1). The amphisbenid reacted to all lunges by opening the mouth, lifting the tail and trying to strike a bite, eventually forming a semicircle with the body seemingly trying to defend itself (Fig. 2 and 3). Some chickens got away after some time, however one chicken continued pecking the worm lizard in an apparent predatory attempt, and the amphisbenid tried to escape. Eventually it reached a tree stub hiding in a hole.

The pursuit lasted about 15 minutes when pictures were taken. No injuries were observed in the *Amphisbaena*. This behavior described as defensive (Gans, 1962) had been observed only when confrontations were provoked experimentally (Gans, 1962; Greene, 1973; Brito *et al.*, 2001). Caudal autotomy did not occur in *A. alba* (this case) on this occasion. This may have been because of the lack of an intravertebral caudal fracture plane and consequently absence of external caudal narrowing (Gans, 1962), a feature different from species such *A. mertensi* (Brito *et al.*, 2001) which used it as an important survival strategy like other amphisbenids (Vanzolini, 1948, 1951).

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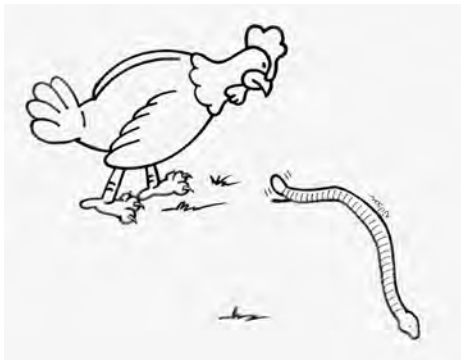


Figure 1. The worm lizard was pursued by a chicken.

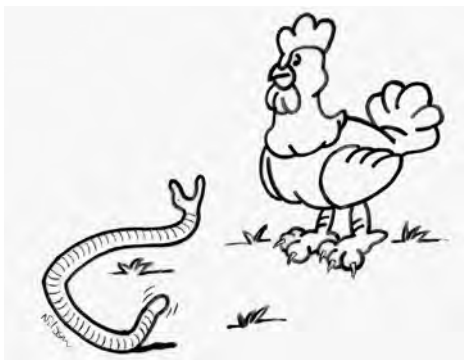


Figure 2. It is forming a semicircle with the body seemingly trying to defend itself.

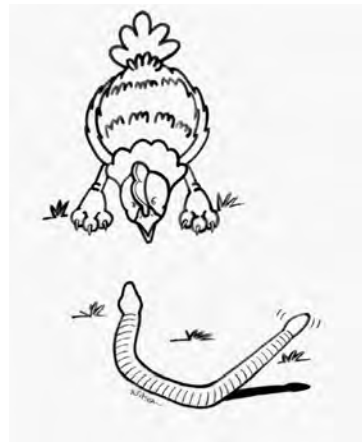


Figure 3. The amphisbenid reacted to all lunges opening the mouth, lifting the tail and trying to strike a bite.