

HERPETOFAUNA ASSOCIATED WITH *ERYNGIUM PANICULATUM* SHRUB IN SUBTROPICAL SAVANNAS FROM THE NORTHEAST OF ARGENTINA

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During herpetological studies in the subtropical savannas of northwestern Corrientes province (Argentina), we removed bushes of *Eryngium paniculatum* (Umbelliferae), a species with a foliar anatomy similar to that of Bromeliads (water storing and provides dry refuges at the base of senescent dry leaves). We discovered a high species richness and abundant herpetofauna associated with *Eryngium*. Each leaf was removed by means of a hoe. We captured sixty specimens of fourteen species (Table 1) during twenty hours of field sampling.

The snakes showed greater species richness and abundance (6 species and 44 specimens) than the lizards and amphibians (2 species and 9 specimens, and 5 species and 8 specimens, respectively). The Wormsnake (*Typhlops brongersmianus*), a poorly represented species in Argentinian herpetological collections, was the most abundant (15 individuals). Egg clutches of three species, *T. brongersmianus*, *T. oculatus* and *Philodryas patagoniensis*, were found. Those of the first two species were in the dry leaves of the base and the *Philodryas*'s eggs in an ant nest of the genus *Atta*.

The high abundance of herpetofauna could be explained by the refuges offered by dry leaves, the abundance of associated microfauna as a feeding resource, and the breeding sites available. On the other hand, the presence of termite nests inside these plants gives refuges to termitophilous and mirmecophilous species.

There are few studies on fauna associated with *Eryngium*. Elizalde y Lallana (1992) compiled information on the insects and they comment that many species of Diptera, Coleoptera, Hemiptera, Lepidoptera, Himenoptera, Homoptera and Neuroptera live inside the leaves. Amongst birds, the Saffron-Cowled Bird (*Xanthopsar flavus*) and the Straight-Billed Bird (*Limnocittes rectirostris*) use these plants for nesting (Fraga & Babarskas, com. pers.) and in the subtropical grasslands several amphibians take refuge on the leaves, principally *Argenteohyla siemersi*, *Hyla berthae*, *Hyla pulchella*, *Hyla nana*, *Hyla sanborni*, *Physalaemus henseli*, *Scinax squalirostris* and *Scinax nasica* (Barrio, 1962; Ceí, 1980; Gallardo, 1987; Gallardo y Varela de Olmedo, 1992). No data about reptiles were found in the literature.

Table 1. Herpetological fauna associated with *Eryngium paniculatum* shrub in Corrientes province, Argentina

Taxa	Common name	Number of specimens
AMPHIBIA (ANURA)		8
BUFONIDAE		2
<i>Melanophryniscus cf. stelzneri</i>	Red Belly Toad	2
HYLIDAE		1
<i>Scinax nasica</i>	Lesser snouted-Tree Frog	1
LEPTODACTYLIDAE		5
<i>Leptodactylus chaquensis</i>	Criolla Chaquenian Frog	2
<i>Leptodactylus gracilis</i>	Striped Frog	1
<i>Physalaemus albonotatus</i>	Menwing Frog	2
REPTILIA		52
LACERTILIA		9
TEIIDAE		2
<i>Teius oculatus</i>	Green Lizard, Teyú	2
ANGUIDAE		7
<i>Ophiodes intermedius</i>	Mboi Capií	7
SERPENTES		44
TYPHLOPIDAE		15
<i>Typhlops brongersmianus</i>	Wormsnake	15
COLUBRIDAE		28
<i>Liophis poecilogyrus</i>	Common Water Snake	5
<i>Oxyrhopus guibei</i>	False Coral Snake	1
<i>Oxyrhopus rhombifer rhombifer</i>	False Coral Snake	6
<i>Philodryas patagoniensis</i>	Savanna Racer Snake	4
<i>Sybinomorphus turgidus</i>	NCN	13

The expansion of *Eryngium* in the local savannas is related to agricultural development and road building (Lallana *et al.*, 1991; Sabattini, *et al.*, 1991); therefore we can suppose that the expansion is recent, having unknown consequences on the herpetological community. This pattern should be studied in more detail.

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