

***CROTALUS DURISSUS TERRIFICUS*
(Rattlesnake): A CASE OF XANTHISM.**

Colouration and pattern are very important to snakes, providing such advantages as camouflage, mimetism or warning. It is alleged that most species of snakes that present albinism or other anomalies are nocturnal (Sazima & Di-Bernardo, 1991). This supposition may be explained by selection against albinism in diurnal snakes, because the loss of protective colouration can make the animal more exposed and vulnerable to predation.

Chromatic anomalies in snakes are rare, and in Brazil, cases of albinism, melanism, erithrism, among others, have been reported in only a few species of the Boidae, Colubridae and Viperidae families (Amaral, 1927a,b; Amaral, 1932; Amaral, 1934; Hoge, 1952; Hoge & Belluomini, 1957/58; Andrade & Abe, 1998; Duarte *et al.*, 2005). However, some cases of xanthism are known: one concerning a specimen of *Epicrates cenchria* (Hoge & Belluomini, 1957/58) and another in *Sibynomorphus turgidus* (Amaral, 1933/34). Xanthism is defined as a pigmentary anomaly of genetic origin, in which there is lack of melanin and predominance of yellow pigments <www.ophidia.org.ve>.

Snakes of the genus *Crotalus* are terrestrial ambush predators; their most salient characteristic is the presence of a rattle in the tip of the tail. In Brazil there is only a single species, *Crotalus durissus*, which has a large distribution within savannah (*cerrado*), arid regions (*caatinga*) and open areas (Melgarejo, 2003). There are a few reported cases of albinism in this species (Amaral, 1927a; Amaral, 1932; Amaral, 1934; Duarte *et al.*, 2005) and also melanism (Silva *et al.*, 1999). This note reports a case of xanthism in a specimen of *Crotalus durissus terrificus*. The snake, a young female (500 mm in snout vent length, 35 mm in tail length, and 100g), was collected in Lindóia – SP (22°31'S; 46°39'W) in July 2005, with two other individuals of a similar size, but with normal colour patterns. This individual is yellow throughout the entire body, including the head, with lighter stains in the post-ocular region. The characteristic dorsal markings are dark yellow, bordered with scales of lighter yellow. The nape marking is also dark yellow, bordered by light yellow scales, and the gular region is light

Figure 1. *Crotalus durissus terrificus* with xanthism. Female (500 mm in snout vent length, 35 mm in tail length, 100 g).



yellow. The venter is yellowish and its eyes are a silvery colour (Fig. 1). The snake is currently maintained as a captive in the Herpetology Laboratory at Instituto Butantan, São Paulo, Brazil.

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