Some snakes have the ability to feed on comparatively large prey (Gavira and Andrade, 2013), which, in some cases, may exceed their own body masses (Greene, 1983, 1992; Secor and Diamond, 1997). Following prey ingestion, snakes must complete digestion before the prey begins to putrefy inside their gut due to bacterial action (Pough et al., 2003).

*Oxyrhopus guibei* Hoge and Romano, 1977 is a terrestrial South American false coral snake, occurring in Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina (Hoge and Romano, 1977; Zaher and Caramaschi, 1992). This species has crepuscular-nocturnal activity, inhabiting forest edges, open habitats, and urban areas (Sazima and Abe, 1991). *Oxyrhopus guibei* feeds mainly on rodents and small lizards (Andrade and Silvano, 1996; França et al., 2008; Alencar et al., 2009; Barbo et al., 2011), and is also known for preying on considerably large prey, sometimes even exceeding its ingestion capacity (Sazima and Martins, 1990). Herein, we report an episode of feeding-related mortality of a juvenile *O. guibei* following the consumption of an adult tropical house gecko, *Hemidactylus mabouia* Moreau de Jonnès, 1818.

At 1430 h on 04 July 2013, we collected a live juvenile false coral snake, *O. guibei* (body mass after prey removal: 5.25 g, total length 28.7 cm), on the grass next to a food warehouse, in the municipality of Rio Claro, São Paulo State, southeast Brazil (22.23314°S, 47.34286°W; 620 m a.s.l.). The snake had a bloated mid-body (Figure 1A) and attempted to regurgitate several times, but ended up deceasing about three hours after capture.

Upon dissection, we found that the snake had ingested, headfirst, a tropical house gecko, *Hemidactylus mabouia* (Figure 1B). The prey, even though partially digested (note the absence of the gecko’s head and anterior limbs in Figure 1B), still represented ca. 72% of the snake’s body mass and 45% of its total length. Both voucher specimens were deposited in the Herpetological Collection of the Instituto Butantan, São Paulo, SP (IBSP 86169).

Snake deaths presumably related to the inability to digest oversized prey have been previously reported (e.g. Leavitt, 2010; Cavalcanti et al., 2012; Arsovski et al., 2014), including in a congeneric species, *O. petolarius* Linnaeus, 1758 (Nogueira et al., 2013). Hence, some snakes’ misevaluation of their ability to capture, ingest (see Sazima and Martins, 1990), and digest comparatively oversized prey, mainly by naive individuals, may prove highly maladaptive.

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References


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Figure 1. A) The bloated body of a freshly dead juvenile *Oxyrhopus guibei* after ingesting a house gecko; B) Juvenile *O. guibei* with its stomach contents, a partially digested *Hemidactylus mabouia*. 
Death of a juvenile false-coral snake, after ingesting a Tropical house gecko