

OBSERVATIONS OF A GROUP OF RED NECKED ARACARIS (*PTEROGLOSSUS BITORQUATUS*) ATTACKING A VINE SNAKE (*OXYBELIS FULGIDUS*) IN RONDONIA, BRAZIL

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At 16:30h on 28 January 1994 while walking in *terra firme* rainforest at Rancho Grande, near Ariquemes, Rondonia, Brazil I noted a lone Red-necked Aracari (*Pteroglossus bitorquatus*) about 20 m up in the crown of a large emergent tree. I observed the bird through 10 x 50 binoculars as it slowly hopped along the top section of a large almost horizontal bough. Between the small jay-like hops it stopped to peer around for prey items. The bird then flew down to another bough about 1.5 m below, upon where it lurched and pecked at something out of my sight. Immediately the tail of a green snake appeared and the snake slid quickly along the bough for about 2 m. The snake then coiled up into a striking position facing the aracari. I then was able to focus my telescope on the snake and with the help of 30x magnification I identified the snake as a vine snake (*Oxybelis fulgidus*) of the family *Colubridae*. The snake was an adult and about 1 m in length, bright emerald green above, yellow/green below with its characteristic triangular head. The aracari looked at the coiled snake, then flew and hopped up onto a medium sized branch about 0.5 m above the bough which the snake was on. The bird moved a little on this branch as it watched the snake from a safe distance, keeping approximately 2–3 m away. After about 30 seconds the snake started to move back along the bough towards the spot from where it had first been disturbed. By this time another aracari had appeared in the vicinity, and

as the snake was moving almost directly below the first aracari, the first bird launched itself off the branch and flew down towards the snake. Here the aracari landed and struck at the snake's head with its sizable bill. The aracari held the snake's head briefly in its beak, shaking it, before either the aracari let the snake go or the snake managed to escape. The aracari then flew up to a nearby perch, and the snake fled quickly along the bough in the direction of the main trunk. Two more aracaris now appeared bringing the group total to 4; they all were calling an excited guttural rattling call, and either flew short distances or hopped through the tree after the snake. Unfortunately the snake was now out of sight and a few seconds passed before the snake reappeared as it fell out of the tree presumably in an attempt to escape. The snake continued to fall until it reached the crown of a lower tree about 8-10 m below. I lost site of the snake as it disappeared into the thick foliage of the tree. The aracaris now numbering 5, all flew down, diving into the leafy crown of this tree after the snake. I unfortunately was unable to see what was going on but after a few seconds I heard the snake drop through the foliage of the tree and was heard to hit the forest floor about 10 m below. This time none of the aracaris followed the snake to the forest floor; the snake presumably escaped this attack successfully.

The larger toucans (*Ramphastidae*), in the genus *Ramphastos* have previously been recorded

to attack small snakes. In Costa Rica both *R. sulfuratus* and *R. swainsonni* have been reported to feed on small snakes (Stiles & Skutch 1989). However I can find no reports of either attacks on snakes or snakes as prey items for any of the *Pteroglossus aracari*'s.

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