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Territorial behavior in female spiny lava lizard, *Tropidurus spinulosus* (Cope, 1862) in Cerro Arco, district of Tobatí (Dept. of Cordillera, Paraguay)

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Resumen: Este estudio reporta una observación fortuita del comportamiento territorial y encuentros agonísticos entre dos hembras de *Tropidurus spinulosus* en Cerro Arco, Paraguay. La observación, que duró aproximadamente 90 minutos, reveló una compleja exhibición de comunicación visual, que incluía balanceo de la cabeza, flexiones y distensión de la región gular. Las hembras se involucraron en secuencias repetidas de patrones motores y visuales, incluyendo mordeduras y persecuciones, con una hembra finalmente dominando a la otra y desplazándola del área. Los comportamientos observados son consistentes con los reportados en otras especies de *Tropidurus* y resaltan la importancia de la defensa territorial en las hembras. Este estudio contribuye al conocimiento limitado sobre los patrones de comportamiento de *T. spinulosus*, particularmente en lo que respecta a las interacciones hembra-hembra, y subraya la necesidad de más investigación sobre la ecología del comportamiento de esta especie. Los hallazgos de este estudio pueden informar los esfuerzos de conservación y resaltar la importancia de evaluaciones rápidas de la biodiversidad para comprender mejor los patrones de comportamiento normales y anormales en las especies silvestres.

The spiny lava lizard *Tropidurus spinulosus* (Cope, 1862) is a small to medium-sized lizard distributed in north-central Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Brazil (Carvalho, 2013) that inhabits both rocky and forest habitats (Cruz, 1998). This species exhibits pronounced sexual dimorphism, with males displaying different coloration, shape, and body length compared to females (Pinto *et al.*,2005). They have a hierarchical social structure, with territories defended by the largest males (Kohlsdorf *et al.*,2006). Although aspects such as diet, reproduction, daily activity, thermal ecology, and habitat use have been studied (Perez *et al.*,1991; Vitt, 1991;

Martori & Still, 1994; López-Juri *et al.*,2017), little is known about territorial or dominance behavior among females of the species.

A positive correlation between morphological characteristics and territory defense is frequently observed (Price, 1984). Therefore, in species where females choose males or the territories they defend, the best males tend to occupy the best territories (Candolin & Voigt, 2001) and are more likely to be preferred by females.

To reduce the chances of detection and capture by predators, some species display various defense mechanisms, including immobility and active escape (Cooper & Blumstein, 2015). In lizards, several factors affect individual decisions regarding the probability of such defensive behaviors occurring, such as body size (Maia-Carneiro & Rocha, 2015), body temperature, microhabitat (Rocha & Bergallo, 1990; Maia Carneiro & Rocha, 2015; Santana *et al.*,2014), and microhabitat characteristics (López & Martín, 2013), including distance from a shelter and vegetation (Cooper & Blumstein, 2015).

In some species, females may exhibit territorial defense behavior (Carpenter, 1978) and establish home ranges for foraging purposes (Stamps, 1977), but relatively little is known about possible female-female interactions (Crews & Greenbefg, 1981). Apparently, the social structure in this species is complex, with typically a dominant male and several females. Harems of females associated with a male have been recorded for iguanids sensu lato (Carpenter, 1967); and in females of some species of *Tropidurus*, Carpenter (1977) described agonistic behaviors and assertiveness displays.

There are several previous studies on agonistic behavior in female lizards around the world, describing the role of female aggression in functional contexts and mating strategies (While *et al.*, 2009); female competition and resource defense (Stuart Smith *et al.*, 2007), mate defense and mating success (Wu *et al.*, 2018).

The evolution of agonistic interactions reflects the balance between the need to compete for resources and the costs of physical combat. Through mechanisms such as threat displays, sequential assessment, and learning, many animals have evolved strategies that allow them to resolve disputes without resorting to physical aggression. These strategies, which minimize the risks and costs of conflict, have been shaped by both natural selection and the need for efficient conflict resolution in a variety of social and ecological contexts. Studies provide valuable insights into how animals manage agonistic interactions through evolved signaling and strategic decision-making processes, highlighting the complexity of conflict resolution in the animal kingdom. (Lailvaux & Irschick, 2007; Henningsen & Irschick, 2012);

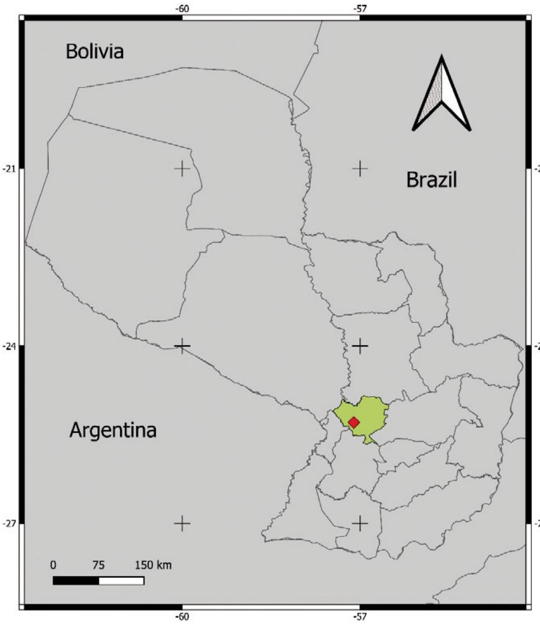

Figure 1: Study area in the Department of Cordillera, Tobati City, specifically in the Cerro Arco area (-25.26537, -57.08308). The red marker indicates the observation spot.

Figura 1: Área de estudio en el Departamento de Cordillera, Ciudad de Tobatí, específicamente en la zona de Cerro Arco (-25.26537, -57.08308). El marcador rojo indica el punto de observación.

and progressive escalation to physical combat (Whiting *et al.*, 2003). The Lizard *Tropidurus spinulosus* use both their physical features (morphology) and their color patterns (chromatism) in aggressive encounters, with these factors influencing the success and outcome of such encounters (Rossi *et al.*, 2022).

The event observed was a serendipitous sighting, documented in the Department of Cordillera, city of Tobatí, Paraguay, specifically in the Cerro Arco area at coordinates -25.26537, -57.08308 (Figure 1). This area is characterized by the presence of friable sandstones and saccharoids (Degraff, 1982; Wiens, 1984; Lippolt, 1985) The rocks of the hill are a set of minerals such as silicon, silver, gold, among others. The earthly formation of the hill is composed of stones that are practically compacted sand, which allows vegetation and the presence of fauna in the area, Cerro Arco is very diverse, ranging from subtropical rainforests in the highest areas to savannah and grasslands in the lower and drier areas. The area is rich in biodiversity, both flora and fauna, and is an example of the interaction of two ecosystems, the Atlantic Forest and the Chaco, which combine in this region of the country (Figure 2).

Tropidurus spinulosus were observed engaging in combat or aggressive behavior on the stones that constituted the geological composition of Cerro Arco on July 26, 2022, Winter season in Paraguay, not coinciding with mating season, at approximately 15 h. These behaviors were filmed and observed for approximately 90 minutes within a radius of about 5 meters, The distance between the observer and the interaction was about one and a half meters, where these behaviors were observed to occur repeatedly. The videos were recorded using a smartphone camera (*iPhone* XS Max) and were analyzed to describe the observed behavioral patterns. The videos were analyzed directly by the authors; no software or other computer tools were used for this purpose.

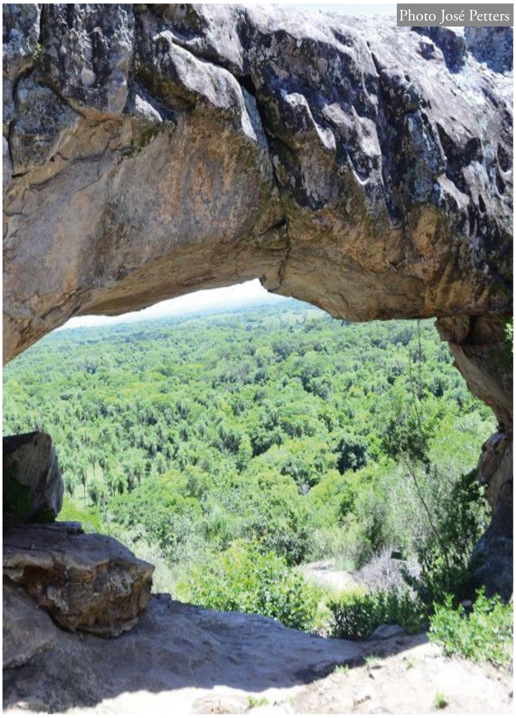

Figure 2: Photo of the site where the event was witnessed. The arch was modeled by mechanical weathering and erosion selective in fluvial environments, where the sandstones of lower resistance were eliminated and the vault was constituted, while the silicified sandstones remained and in this way the stone dome was established.
Figura 2: Sitio donde se observó el evento. El arco fue modelado por meteorización mecánica y erosión selectiva en ambientes fluviales, donde se eliminaron las areniscas de menor resistencia y se constituyó la bóveda, mientras que las areniscas silicificadas permanecieron y de esta manera se estableció la cúpula de piedra.

The description of the behavior was clearly based on what was observed in the videos provided, the ethogram was made using previous behavioral studies to describe the patterns, no software, artificial intelligence or other computer tools were used for the description of them (Abdala & Ramírez-Pinilla, 1990; Van Sluys, 1993; Van Sluys 2000; Rocha *et al.*,2009; Ribeiro *et al.*,2010; Silva *et al.*, 2022).

Figure 3: *Tropidurus spinulosus*, where the lack of a portion of the tail is observed, in the initial state of regeneration (female 1).
Figura 3: *Tropidurus spinulosus*, donde se observa la falta de una porción de la cola, en el estado inicial de regeneración (hembra 1).

The females of *T. spinulosus*, displayed sign of having undergone caudal autotomy, as it exhibited the absence of a portion of its tail (female 1), which was in the process of regeneration. After some time, a second female (female 2) was observed, and during a period of approximately 90 minutes of focal observations, a total of 8 videos were recorded, each lasting around 3 to 5 minutes, capturing the most prominent behavioral patterns. It is worth mentioning that the event was filmed until a female 2 left the area. These behaviors included intense head movements or bobbing and aggressive movements in interactions (e.g. chasing).

Initially, female 1 was observed adopting an alert posture, without moving or fleeing, but rather scanning the environment (Figure 3). Subsequently, it began to perform push-up movements, rhythmically moving its head up and down, after which female 2 swiftly approached and initiated an attack on female 1. The females performed six rapid push-ups (1.5 s) <https://www.herpetologica.org/BAHE/videos/BAHE35_2[H3533-1].mp4>.

Females 1 and 2 then remained motionless after sensing the presence of a potential predator (the human observer) trying to remain cryptic and less detectable, monitoring each other's movements.

Both females moved their heads up and down, a movement known as Head Bobbing. Regarding territory defense, the observed movements varied from head bobbing or swinging, to distension of the gular region, and direct pursuit. This agonistic encounter involved various head movements, approaches, and biting by female 2, who exhibited greater aggression compared to female 1 <https://www.herpetologica.org/BAHE/videos/BAHE35_2[H3533-2].mp4>.

Instances of fighting behavior between the individuals were also observed; female 2 initiated biting towards female 1, who responded differently by attempting to avoid the aggression, ultimately resulting in dominance by female 2 (Figure 4), leading to the displacement of female 1 from the area.

Literature suggests that *Tropidurus melanopleurus* are territorial and exhibit a social structure in which females select territories within the domain of a resident male (Abdala & Ramírez-Pinilla, 1990). Males tend to maintain loyalty to a territory, and observations indicate that females display similar territorial behavior patterns. Silva *et al.*, (2022) in males performing territorial dominance behaviors in the *Tropidurus torquatus*, like the behavior in males, the females remained in a defensive posture, sometimes remaining with their heads in the direction of the other female.

Highlighted the significance of body posture, head movement, and coloration for both reproduction and territory defense (Van Sluys,

Figure 4: Fighting behavior between the individuals. Female 2 performing lateral bites on female 1, which does not respond to these actions.
Figura 4: Comportamiento de lucha entre los individuos Hembra 2 realizando mordeduras laterales a la hembra 1, que no responde a estas acciones.

1993 & 2000; Rocha *et al.*,2009; Ribeiro *et al.*,2010), constituting a major part of their behavioral repertoire. Head movements and displays of push-ups followed by gular region distension, represent a complex form of visual communication in lizards, predominantly observed in males (Radder *et al.*,2006), with a similar dominance pattern observed in females.

The behavioral patterns exhibited by the females in this study are consistent with those described in a study conducted in Brazil with females and males of the species *T. spinulosus* in captivity, where females were observed to display territorial behaviors towards other females more frequently than any other form of interaction (Pelegrin, 2019).

Table 1: Main behaviors observed.
Tabla 1: Principales comportamientos observados.

Behavior presented	Female 1	Female 2
Head movements or bobbing	●	●
Push-up movements	●	
Rhythmically moving its head up and down	●	
Attack and biting	●	●
Motionless (presence of a potential predator)	●	●
Distension of the gular region	●	●
Direct pursuit	●	●
Adopting an alert posture		●

These observed behaviors are like those described for other *Tropidurus* species (Carpenter, 1977; Abdala & Ramirez-Pinilla, 1990), as well as for iguanids in general (Noble & Bradley, 1933; Carpenter, 1967).

Display action patterns of *T. occipitalis* (continental Ecuador) reported by Carpenter (1967) consist of sequences of three rapid push-ups (1.4 s), exhibiting similarities in body participation and posture to species of this genus in the Galapagos Islands. Both *T. hispidus* (British Guiana) and *T. torquatus* (Suriname) demonstrate very similar display action patterns involving rapid head movements and nod sequences in <1 s, comparable to those observed in the study specimens.

This study adds to the very limited behaviors information for this lizard species. Furthermore, the contribution on behavior and competition between females is not commonly reported, this highlights the importance of using multiple methods, to have a better knowledge of the patterns of territorial behavior in this species. We hope, our observation strengthens existing national and regional reports. Finally, we recommend conducting more rapid biodiversity assessments specifically in terms of behavioral reporting to better understand normal or abnormal behavioral patterns in our wild species.

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Dermopatía proliferativa en un ejemplar de *Iberolacerta galani*

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Key words: dermopathy, Leonese rock lizard, wildlife pathology.

La detección de dermatopatías en saurios salvajes es un hecho poco habitual. Estos hallazgos aportan conocimiento importante sobre la vulnerabilidad de ciertas especies a padecer enfermedades y, en consecuencia, al posible efecto que ello pueda tener en su conservación, especialmente en especies de reducida área de distribución. En esta nota se describe por primera vez una lesión dérmica en una lagartija leonesa (*Iberolacerta galani*) salvaje.

El ejemplar fue detectado en una visita realizada el 21 de marzo de 2024 a la Laguna de