Boa constrictor amarali (Reptilia, Serpentes, Boidae): first record of albinism in the wild

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Color patterns may influence the ecology of snakes by providing advantages mainly in camouflage, mimetism and aposematism. In Brazil, chromatic anomalies in snakes, such as xanthism, melanism, and erythrism have been reported in some species (Amaral, 1932; Amaral, 1934; Andrade and Abe, 1998; Hoge, 1952; Hoge and Belluomini, 1957/58; Silva *et al.,* 1999; Sueiro *et al.,* 2010; Travaglia-Cardoso and Parpinelli, 2006). Albinism is the most commonly reported chromatic anomaly (Amaral, 1927a,b; Silva *et al.,* 2010).

Here we report the first record of albinism for *Boa constrictor amarali,* a species whose identification is based on pholidosis (Langhammer, 1983) and geographical distribution. *Boa constrictor amarali* occurs in a wide range of habitats in southeastern Brazil as well as in parts of the Midwestern and Southern regions (Albino and Carlini, 2008).

An adult female (snout-vent length = 1490 mm; tail length = 160 mm; mass = 2650 g; Figs. 1-2) was collected in Brotas (22°17'S; 48°07'W), São Paulo, Brazil in April 2014. The vegetation cover in this region consists mainly of Cerrado and gallery forests.

This specimen shows a slightly yellowish white coloration all over the body, including the head and venter. The characteristic dorsal marks have the same color as the body, but with darker yellow borders. The standard marks of the eyes are present but with much lighter colors than usual and the tongue is pink.

The cryptic coloration common in *Boa constrictor amarali* provides an effective camouflage in its natural environment, both on the ground and tree branches, so that changes in the normal color pattern may be unfavorable for snakes (Andrén and Nilson, 1981). Some authors suggest that chromatic anomalies are more common in species of crepuscular or nocturnal habits (Sazima and Di-Bernardo, 1991; Esqueda *et al.,* 2005). The loss of protective coloration probably leads the animal to more exposure, thus making it more vulnerable to predation, especially by visually guided predators.

The snake was captured as an adult, and displays a number of scars on its body (Figures 3 and 4), which are probably due to unsuccessful predation events. Boids are robust snakes from birth, which may inhibit the success of their predators.

This female was collected in her vitellogenesis period (see Pizzatto and Marques, 2007). The literature reports a predominance of females among captured snakes that show chromatic anomalies (Sueiro *et al.,* 2010). This may be related to the female need for increased exposure during thermoregulatory activities.

Albinism in *Boa constrictor amarali* has never been recorded in the wild. The specimen is being maintained in the Biological Museum of the Instituto Butantan.

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Figure 1: *Boa constrictor amarali.* Adult female.



Figure 2: *Boa constrictor amarali.* Adult female: observe scars on head and in details scars on body.

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Oxyrhopus melanogenys, Porto Velho, RO. Foto: Sérgio Muniz.