

## CANNIBALISM AND LIZARD PREDATION IN SKINK LIZARDS.

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The prey taken by the smaller Australian scincids is poorly documented. In anecdotal works they are generally said to feed on invertebrates. This, to some extent, is substantiated in studies done by Smyth (1968); Smyth and Smith (1974) and Crome (1981). Rankin (1978) reported fighting in juvenile *Sphenomorphus pardalis*. In the light of observations presented here this fighting may have resulted from attempts by the juveniles to eat each other. Pianka and Giles (1982) in their summary of the stomach contents of 124 *Egernia inornata* found lizards or shed skin constituted 0.46% of the total number of prey items identified. A sub-adult *Tiliqua scincoides* has been observed in captivity to catch and eat *Lampropholis mustelina* and other small grass skinks (AHS members, 1982:19). No doubt many of the larger scincids attempt to eat smaller ones however the agility of these small lizards would lessen the likelihood of this occurring in the wild. The same may be the case in the two following observations.

In April, 1982 I collected a number of adult and juvenile *Hemiergis peronii* for examination from Quagi Beach (33°48S, 121°18E). These were placed together in an icecream container with sand and leaf-litter. At about 8 pm I was attracted to the container by the sound of rattling leaf-litter and I observed an adult *H. peronii* in the process of swallowing a juvenile. After examining the contents of the container I found that many of the juveniles had met with the same fate.

The second observation occurred in March, 1987. After returning from a trip to the Nullarbor Plain an *Omolepida branchialis*, *Morethia adelaidensis* and *Ctenotus leonhardii* were housed together in a small aquarium. The *O. branchialis* (a juvenile of 44 mm S-V L) was observed a short time later swallowing the *M. adelaidensis* (27 mm S-V L). The next day I was most surprised to see the *O. branchialis* doing the same to the *C. leonhardii* (34 mm S-V L).

The observation of *H. peronii* cannibalism may reflect what occurs in the wild, however to determine this would require the examination of stomachs of specimens

collected in April and May when large numbers of juveniles are present in the field. I doubt that *Orolepida* branchialis could catch the more active *Morethia* and *Ctenotus* spp. during the day although these could be located at night by the nocturnal *O. branchialis* when they are at rest.

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