

Unusual Feeding Behavior in a Scutellerid: A Case of Scavenging on Snake

In the afternoon of 20 September 1997, two of us (C. C. and O. P.), found along a road going through primary deciduous forest, a dead natricine snake in Huai Nam Dang, Mae Hong Son Province, northern Thailand. The snake, an adult female, was already in a state of decomposition, but its close examination revealed unambiguously that it belonged to the species *Xenochrophis piscator* (SCHNEIDER, 1799), a very common snake throughout Thailand, and distributed from India to western Indonesia (COX, 1991). Its state had enticed several insects: three locusts, one sylphid beetle, and one colourful scutellerid bug, all five actively eating the putrefied flesh. During the five minutes of observations, the bug, *Chrysocoris (Fitha) fascialis* (WHITE, 1842), fed on three places, separated by a few centimeters, on one flank of the snake, and later plunged its whole body into the open abdomen. The bug—a male—was then collected (collection J. E. Eger).

Virtually no information was available to us about the biology of this bug species. Many scutellerids are economically important, being major pests for agriculture, and SCHUH & SLATER (1995: 240) indicate that all species are plant feeders. Our observations are the first report of non-phytophagous feeding for a scutellerid and go thus against what we knew about this group. While this represents but one single case, and while it is also well-known that insects can occasionally exhibit most unlikely feeding acts which should not be interpreted as a normal way of feeding, we nevertheless feel that our observation may represent a new finding about an alternative, normal feeding habit in scutellerids which may lead to more information on their biology. Adler and Wheeler (1984) point out carrion feeding by other heteropteran families, including Pentatomidae, Acanthosomatidae and Cydnidae.

Chrysocoris (Fitha) fascialis was previously reported from India, Burma, Macao, and Taiwan (ATKINSON, 1887; DALLAS, 1851; DISTANT, 1902; ESAKI, 1926; KIRKALDY, 1909, 1910; LETHIERRY & SEVERIN, 1893; STÅL, 1873; WALKER, 1867; WHITE, 1842). Our specimen may constitute the first record of this species from Thailand, although its presence in this country could be reasonably deduced from the previous localities.

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