

CARETTA CARETTA (LOGGERHEAD SEATURTLE) –PREDATION

Hatchling seaturtles have a large number of documented predators (Dodd 1988, US Fish. Wildl. Serv., Biol. Rep. 88 [14], 110pp; and Stancick 1995. In Bjorndal [ed.], Biology and Conservation of Sea Turtles, 2nd ed., Smithsonian Institution Press, p. 139-152]. However, seaturtle predation by anuran amphibians is apparently unreported to date. Here we report the predation of Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) hatchlings by the Cururu Toad (*Bufo jimi* Steveaux 2002), observed on two different occasions at the District of Arembepe, City of Camaçari, Bahia, Northeast Brazil (12°45'42,8'' S, 38°10'05,5'' W).

Projeto TAMAR-IBAMA (the Brazilian National Sea Turtle Conservation Program) maintains a field station in this area. Some seaturtle nests are transferred to an open hatchery, which consists of a 130 m² area, surrounded by a fence, fully exposed to sun and rain, and located at the suprashore zone, at the vegetation line. Extensive wetlands are located very close to the sandy beach. Inside the fence, each nest receives an individual screen fence, where recently emerged hatchlings are temporarily retained and then released after data collection. Occasionally some of the hatchlings escape from the protection screens.

On several occasions the presence of *Bufo jimi* inside the hatchery was noted, never more than one specimen at a time. In February 2003, attempted predation on *C. caretta* hatchlings by *B. jimi*, was observed, when over 20 hatchlings of *C. caretta* and *Eretmochelys imbricata* escaped from the protective screens and dispersed through the hatchery. A toad, using a sit-and-wait strategy, was observed attempting to capture several turtle hatchlings. It appeared to have no success in swallowing them; all the captured hatchlings were released after the ingestion attempts and no successful predation was observed. However, the *B. jimi* specimen was then captured and sacrificed; necropsy and examination of stomach contents revealed a *C. caretta* hatchling with a straight-line carapace length of 46 mm. In January 2004, another *B. jimi* specimen was found inside the hatchery, beside one of the nests, where there was a retained *C. caretta* hatchling. This time, there were no dispersed turtle hatchlings in the hatchery. This toad was also captured and sacrificed and necropsy revealed one *C. caretta* hatchling in the stomach (no suitable measurements were possible due to carapace damage caused by digestion).

The area where this hatchling predation occurred is located 20 m away from the natural Loggerhead nesting sites. The artificial concentration of nests in a single place (hatchery), and the closeness of wetlands, providing a suitable environment for the reproduction of *B. jimi*, creates a synergism that requires additional care in local management of Loggerhead Seaturtles.

The *B. jimi* specimens were deposited at Museu Nacional do Rio de Janeiro (MNRJ 30804) and Museu de Biologia Mello Leitão (MBML 3670); the ingested *C. caretta* were deposited at Museu de Biologia Mello Leitão (MBML 1706-07).

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