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João Miguel Alves Nunes

Comportamento defensivo de Jararacas:
uma abordagem ecológica e epidemiológica

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Dissertação apresentada como parte dos requisitos para obtenção do título de Mestre em Biodiversidade, junto ao Programa de Pós-Graduação de Biodiversidade, do Instituto de Biociências, Letras e Ciências Exatas da Universidade Estadual Paulista “Júlio de Mesquita Filho”, Câmpus de São José do Rio Preto.

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Orientador: Prof^a. Dr^a. Otávio Augusto Vuolo
Marques
Coorientador: Prof^a. Dr^a. Selma Maria Almeida
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1. Otávio A.V. Marques. 2. Paulo S. Bernade. 3. Ricardo J. Sawaya. Comportamento defensivo de Jararacas: Uma abordagem ecológica e epidemiológica

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Financiadora: CAPES

Comissão Examinadora

Prof. Dr. Otávio A. Vuolo Marques
UNESP – Câmpus de São José do Rio Preto
Orientador

Prof. Dr. Ricardo Jannini Sawaya
UFABC

Prof. Dr. Paulo Sérgio Bernarde
UFAC

São José do Rio Preto
05 de setembro de 2022

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É entendendo a complexidade da natureza que podemos a simplicidade humana.

RESUMO

Uma das relações mais importantes entre os seres vivos na natureza é a predação. A partir dela é que surgem os comportamentos defensivos. Essa classe comportamental é amplamente abrangente e diversificada entre os répteis, principalmente entre as serpentes. As adaptações comportamentais para se defender sofrem influência de diversos fatores ambientais e intrínsecos aos animais, tornando-se um meio pelo qual a evolução pode agir. Além disso, é através de um destes comportamentos que desencadeiam os acidentes causados por serpentes peçonhentas. O objetivo deste trabalho foi entender o comportamento defensivo sob uma perspectiva ecológica e utilizá-lo como ferramenta no entendimento da epidemiologia de acidentes ofídicos. Com base nisso, o grupo *Bothrops* se tornou um excelente objeto de pesquisa. Dentro deste grupo, *Bothrops jararaca* é uma das serpentes de maior representatividade em acidentes ofídicos do país além de possuir uma história evolutiva de espécies relacionados que podem exercer influência no comportamento defensivo. *Bothrops insularis* e *Bothrops alcatraz*, são duas espécies endêmicas de ilhas, com origens e parentesco com *B. jararaca* semelhantes, porém possuem ecologias e pressões de predação diferentes. O trabalho foi dividido em dois capítulos. O primeiro trata da associação entre fatores bióticos e abióticos no comportamento defensivo e padrões epidemiológicos, utilizando a *B. jararaca*. O segundo capítulo, visa entender se o comportamento defensivo da jararaca continental e as jararacas insulares sofre influência dos tipos de estímulos predatórios e como são os padrões comportamentais exibidos. Com base nisso, foi obtido um estudo do comportamento defensivo abrangente e relevante.

PALVRAS-CHAVE: Comportamento defensivo. Jararaca. Jararacas insulares. Epidemiologia. Ecologia

ABSTRACT

One of the most important relationships between living beings in nature is predation. It is from these defensive behaviors arise from it. This behavioral class is wide-ranging and diverse among reptiles, especially snakes. The behavioral adaptations to defend themselves are influenced by several environmental factors and intrinsic to the animals, becoming a means by which evolution can act. Furthermore, it is through one of these behaviors that accidents caused by venomous snakes are triggered. The objective of this work was to understand defensive behavior from an ecological perspective and use it as a tool to understand the epidemiology of ophidian accidents. Based on this, the *Bothrops* group became an excellent object of research. Within this group, *Bothrops jararaca* is one of the most representative snakes in ophidian accidents in the country, besides having an evolutionary history of related species that may influence defensive behavior. *Bothrops insularis* and *Bothrops alcatraz* are two endemic species of islands, with similar origins and kinship with *B. jararaca*, but with different ecologies and predation pressures. The paper is divided into two chapters. The first deals with the association between biotic and abiotic factors in defensive behavior and epidemiological patterns, using *B. jararaca*. The second chapter, aims to understand if the defensive behavior of the continental jararaca and the insular jararacas is influenced by the types of predatory stimuli and what the behavioral patterns exhibited are like. Based on this, a comprehensive and relevant study of defensive behavior was obtained.

KEY WORDS: Defensive behavior. Jararaca. Insular jararaca. Epidemiology. Ecology

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1. CHAPTER 1: Association between defensive bite behavior and snakebite epidemiology: A new tool for understanding epidemiological data

1.2 INTRODUCTION

Snakebite is a potentially fatal disease caused by toxins in the bite of a venomous snake. About 4.5-5.4 million people are bitten annually by snakes worldwide (WHO, 2021). Snakebite has been classified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a high-priority neglected tropical disease. Most of the research on snakebites is focused on venom - its properties, effects, and antidotes (LANCET, 2019). The rest focuses mainly on the analysis of incidence and individual risk factors (GUTIERREZ *et al.*, 2017), however, studies related to snake ecology remain a less discussed topic.

Snakebite shares many epidemiological similarities with zoonoses. Understanding the ecology of hosts and vectors, as well as pathogens, has been critical to the control of zoonoses (MORRI *et al.*, 2019). There is very little research that relates snake ecology to snakebites. The epidemiological understanding of ophidian accidents remains limited, which hinders efforts to accurately map, predict, and mitigate the risk of ophidian accidents (MORRI *et al.*, 2019)). Therefore, a more dynamic understanding of the ecological determinants of venomous snakes will greatly enhance control. Developing the ability to interpret the impact of ecological, behavioral, and environmental parameters may provide new tools to reduce human-snake contact and prevent the impact of ophidian envenomation on communities (WHO, 2021).

One of the important ecological behavioral variables for the study related to snake bites is antipredator behavior. However, to date, there has been no study that relates the two topics with the property. From the accidental encounter between a human and a snake, the snake will defend itself and may use one of its antipredator behavior mechanisms (biting) and poison the humans (GUTIERREZ *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, when studying biting behavior, we are studying the event that generates the poisoning. This behavior is highly influenced by various intrinsic or environmental factors (STANKOWICH & BLUMSTEIN, 2005). Defensive tactics can change in frequency depending on body size (WHITAKER *et al.*, 2000; SHINE *et al.*, 2002), sex (SHINE *et al.*, 2000; WEBB *et al.*, 2001), aversive stimulus (SCUDDER & CHIZAR, 1977; LLEWELYN *et al.*, 2010), body temperature (MORI & BURGHARDT, 2004; WHITFORD *et al.*, 2020), and a variety of extrinsic factors (SHINE *et al.*, 2000, 2002). These variables can

influence the defensive repertoire in different ways, depending on the context and species of each snake.

Bothrops jararaca is the most common species occurring in the southeast region of Brazil, being responsible for the majority of accidents, about 90% of snakebite cases in the country (FRANÇA & MALAQUE, 2003; RIBEIRO & JORGE, 1997). Due to the diversification of environments of occurrence, cryptic coloration, and high relative abundance, *B. jararaca* has high representativeness of ophidian accidents in Brazil, being of great interest to public health (PUZZI *et al.*, 2008). Sazima (1988, 1992) studying the defensive behavior of *B. jararaca* in the field suggested that the observed behavioral patterns of this species might coincide with the epidemiological data of snakebites, suggesting the study of the ecology of this species to understand and predict the epidemiological data.

Therefore, our goal is to analyze whether intrinsic and environmental aspects interfere with the defensive behavior of *B. jararaca*, and how this is associated with the epidemiology of both snakebites. More specifically, to analyze whether morphological properties, sex, life stage, and environmental aspects such as aversive stimulus, environmental temperature, and time of day interfere with the probability of attack and tolerance of *B. jararaca*. Furthermore, to investigate the association between data on the probability of strike of *B. jararaca* and the average number of snake bites caused by this species.

2.3.RESULTS

2.3.1. Escape behaviors

The behaviors of species belonging to the escape category were strongly influenced by the predatory stimulus. All species flee more frequently when confronted with a terrestrial predator (opossum) than with an avian predator (owl) ($z=5.233$; $p < 0.0001$) (Fig. 2, top graphic). *Bothrops insularis*, independent of the predatory stimulus, showed a higher flee rate than the other species ($z=4.218$; $p < 0.0001$), with a chance of fleeing about 85% higher than *B. jararaca*. Similar pattern was observed for the blunt escape data. All studied species fledged more when confronted with the terrestrial predatory stimulus ($z= 6.626$; $p < .0001$) (Fig.2 , middle graphic). *Bothrops. jararaca*, regardless of the predatory stimulus, had no clear difference in frequency when compared to *B. alcatraz* ($z= -0.999$; $p= 0.3177$). However, *B. insularis*, again, showed higher escape frequencies than the other species, with odds about 97% higher than *B. jararaca* ($z= 2.298$; $p= 0.0215$).

The cocking behavior showed results with different patterns. This behavior was influenced by the species type in different ways depending on the predatory stimulus. The dependence between variables was significant. *Bothrops insularis*, as well as *B. alcatraz*, showed no difference depending on the type of predatory stimulus (*B. insularis*- $z= 0.391$, $p= 0.9988$; *B. alcatraz*- $z=-1.169$, $p=0.8516$). However, the different predatory stimuli influenced the frequency of cocking of *B. jararaca* ($z= -3,936$; $p < 0.0001$).

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