

Scientific note

Invasive centipede (*Scolopendra subspinipes*) preying on a house gecko (*Hemidactylus mercatorius*) in eastern Madagascar

(Arthropoda, Scolopendridae and Squamata, Gekkonidae)

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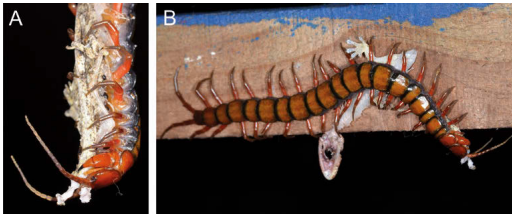


Fig. 1. Centipede (*Scolopendra subspinipes*) preying on a house gecko (*Hemidactylus mercatorius*). **A.** Clinging the tail and the hindlimbs of the gecko with the pairs of legs; **B.** Large parts of the gecko are already consumed.

Centipedes are predatory arthropods that use their venomous forcipules (a pair of modified legs) for painful defensive bites and also to kill their prey. The usual prey of centipedes consists of insects and arachnids, however large species are able to overpower small vertebrates including amphibians, birds, small mammals, and reptiles (e.g. Noronha et al. 2015, Halpin et al. 2021).

Scolopendra subspinipes Leach, 1815 is a cosmopolitan and variable species (Kronmüller 2012, Siriwtut et al. 2016), which can also be found in anthropogenic habitats including houses. The nocturnal house gecko *Hemidactylus mercatorius* Gray, 1842 is often found in human settlements and is probably native, but not endemic to Madagascar (Vences et al. 2004).

Returning from a herpetological nightwalk we found a large invasive centipede (*Scolopendra subspinipes*) on the wooden fence of the terrace of our bungalow of the hotel Nirvana in Ambila-Lemaitso on the east coast of Madagascar (18°52'46.6" S, 49°08'25.3" E, 14 m a.s.l.) on 3 January 2016. With its forcipules and the first 10 pairs of legs it had gripped a *Hemidactylus mercatorius* (field number FGZC 5164), which was apparently freshly dead at the moment of our encounter at 10:57 pm (Fig. 1A). The centipede held the gecko upside down and was nibbling with its mandibles at the tail, which surprisingly was not autotomized during the attack. The lower jaw and the

front legs were already gone and most of the tissue of the body of the gecko was gnawed to the ribs (Fig. 1B). At 11:06 pm the centipede had consumed half of the muscle tissue of the tail leaving just the vertebrae. The remains of the gecko and the scolopender were preserved and stored in the Mention Zoologie et Biodiversité Animale, Antananarivo, Madagascar (UADBA). Considering another observation from the Comoro Islands on *S. subspinipes* eating the Malagasy day gecko *Phelsuma laticauda* (Hawllitschek et al. 2020) we suggest that this invasive centipede species might be a potential predator of other Malagasy reptiles as well.

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