

HISPANIOLAN LIZARD-CUCKOO (*COCCYZUS LONGIROSTRIS*)  
TETHERED BY COMMON GREEN SNAKE (*UROMACER CATESBYI*)

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**Abstract:** Entanglement of birds by snakes is rarely reported. On 15 July 1998, a Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo (*Coccyzus longirostris*) was encountered tethered to a small sapling by common green snake (*Uromacer catesbyi*), which apparently was the intended prey of the cuckoo, in Parque Nacional del Este, Dominican Republic.

**Key words:** *Coccyzus longirostris*, ensnarement, green snake, Hispaniolan Lizard Cuckoo, *Uromacer catesbyi*

**Resumen:** UN PÁJARO BOBO MAYOR (*COCCYZUS LONGIROSTRIS*) ENTRAMPADO POR UNA SERPIENTE VERDE COMÚN (*UROMACER CATESBYI*). El entrapamiento de aves por serpientes es raramente registrado. El 15 de julio de 1998, un Pájaro Bobo Mayor (*Coccyzus longirostris*) fue encontrado sujeto a un pequeño arbusto por una serpiente verde común (*Uromacer catesbyi*), la cual aparentemente era una presa pretendida por el pájaro, en el Parque Nacional del Este, República Dominicana.

**Palabras clave:** *Coccyzus longirostris*, entrapamiento, serpiente verde, Arriero de la Española, *Uromacer catesbyi*

**Résumé :** PRISE AU PIÈGE D'UN TACCO D'HISPANIOLA (*COCCYZUS LONGIROSTRIS*) PAR UN SERPENT VERT ARBORICOLE (*UROMACER CATESBYI*). L'enchevêtrement d'oiseaux avec des serpents est rarement observé. Un Tacco d'Hispaniola (*Coccyzus longirostris*) a été trouvé le 15 juillet 1998 dans le Parc National del Este, en République Dominicaine, attaché à un arbuste par un serpent vert arboricole (*Uromacer catesbyi*), qui était probablement sa proie.

**Mots-clés :** *Coccyzus longirostris*, prise au piège, serpent vert, Tacco d'Hispaniola, *Uromacer catesbyi*

ALTHOUGH BIRDS have been reported ensnared or entangled in a variety of items, this occurs most often with plants. For example, over 12 species of small Passerines have been found entangled in seed heads of burdock (*Arctium minus*; McNicholl 1988,1994). Lincoln (1931) reported entanglement in string or nesting material as the cause of 11 (0.9%) of 1,136 documented avian mortalities. In Mississippi, Samano *et al.* (1998) reported the fatal ensnarement of four endangered Red-cockaded Woodpeckers (*Picoides borealis*) and a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*) in mesh snake traps used to prevent snake predation at Red-cockaded Woodpecker nest sites. In Costa Rica, Graham (1997) reported the fatal entanglement of hermit hummingbirds (*Phaethornis* spp.) in spider webs. There has been at least one reported instance of a bird entangled by a snake. In Arkansas, Meshaka *et al.* (1988) reported an immature Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*) that was strangled by a black rat snake (*Elaphe o. obsoleta*) it had captured until both were rescued. Here I report the ensnarement of a Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo (*Coccyzus longirostris*) by a common green snake (*Uromacer catesbyi*).

OBSERVATIONS

On 15 July 1998, while conducting radiotelemetry of Hispaniolan Parrots (*Amazona ventralis*) in Parque Nacional del Este, Dominican Republic, I encountered an adult Hispaniolan Lizard-Cuckoo struggling vigorously with a 0.5-m long *Uromacer catesbyi*, which the cuckoo had partially ingested. As I approached, the cuckoo attempted several times to take flight. However, before dying the snake had tightly coiled approximately 5 cm of its tail around a small sapling. Because the cuckoo apparently could neither disgorge nor dislodge the now-dead snake, the bird was effectively tethered to the tree. I easily captured the frantically struggling cuckoo by hand and carefully extracted the snake, of which 5 cm had been swallowed, from the cuckoo. It appeared that the head of the snake, being slightly broader than the anterior portion of the body, was primarily the cause of the entrapment as I distinctly felt friction while extracting it. I examined the cuckoo for apparent external injuries and found none. No blood was observed in the bird's mouth nor did the bird's throat appear injured from the encounter. I then photographed the cuckoo and, when released, it immediately flew away.

## DISCUSSION

I am unsure of exactly how long the cuckoo had been held in such manner. However, it certainly was not present when I had passed the same site 2 hr earlier. Although it is unknown whether the cuckoo would have died as result of this incident, the presence of mongooses (*Herpestes javanicus*), feral cats (*Felis silvestris catus*) and the hot, dry climate of the area (Abreu and Guerrero 1997) certainly placed the bird in dire jeopardy under the circumstances. This appears to be the first reported case of a predatory bird actually tethered to a tree by its intended prey. According to Raffaele *et al.* (1998), birds of this genus (*Coccyzus* spp.) commonly consume small reptiles such as snakes, and events of this nature may constitute a previously unknown, albeit rare, potential source of mortality for these birds.

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