

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

USDA National Wildlife Research Center - Staff
Publications

U.S. Department of Agriculture: Animal and
Plant Health Inspection Service

January 2003

***LEIOCEPHALUS CARINATUS ARMOURI* (Northern Curlytailed Lizard) OPPORTUNISTIC PREDATION**

Henry T. Smith

Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Park Service

Richard M. Engeman

USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services, s_r100@yahoo.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/icwdm_usdanwrc



Part of the [Environmental Sciences Commons](#)

Smith, Henry T. and Engeman, Richard M., "*LEIOCEPHALUS CARINATUS ARMOURI* (Northern Curlytailed Lizard) OPPORTUNISTIC PREDATION" (2003). *USDA National Wildlife Research Center - Staff Publications*. 179.

https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/icwdm_usdanwrc/179

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the U.S. Department of Agriculture: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in USDA National Wildlife Research Center - Staff Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

LEIOCEPHALUS CARINATUS ARMOURI (Northern Curly-tailed Lizard) **OPPORTUNISTIC PREDATION**. Distinctive circumstances can result in opportunistic predation on atypical prey (Woodin and Woodin 1981. Florida Field Nat. 9:64). Here, we document an opportunistic predation event by a great barracuda on a northern curly-tailed lizard, *Leiocephalus carinatus armouri*, in South Florida.

At ca. 0800 h on 22 August 2002, a sunny day with a temperature around 27°C, a ca. 7.5 cm SVL adult lizard was observed sunning 0.3 m above the ground on the smooth, painted seawall above the estuarine canal (the Intracoastal Waterway) near Woolbright Road in Boynton Beach, Florida (26°30'N, 80°03'W). Intimate familiarity with the species, especially the characteristic curl in the tail, revealed the lizard to be a northern curly-tailed lizard, *L. carinatus armouri*, a well-established exotic species in Florida (Weigl et al. 1969. Copeia 1969:841–842). Three anglers, visible from the lizard's position, startled the curly-tail by rapidly approaching its perch from the west. Yet, rather than seek escape by climbing down the seawall to the adjacent ground, the lizard fled down the east side of the seawall and promptly fell 1.5 m down into ca. 0.5 m deep water. After struggling at the water surface no more than 2–3 seconds, the lizard disappeared from the surface in a V-waked noisy splash. A relatively small (ca. 70 cm fork length) great barracuda, *Sphraena barracuda*, could be seen ca. 0.3 m below the surface holding the lizard sideways in its jaws. When the anglers climbed onto the seawall to view the commotion, the barracuda, still with the curly-tail, darted out of view. Observations of the general area continued until about 0805 h, but neither the barracuda nor lizard was seen again.

A breeding population of curly-tailed lizards has existed at the Woolbright Road location since at least 1986, and this species is one of the most common reptiles in the local area (HTS, pers. obs.). Previous observations of northern curly-tailed lizards over many years at this site have shown it to be an agile terrestrial reptile that climbs rough-surfaced hard structures (e.g., cement staircases) with ease and habitually seeks shelter in structural crevices when disturbed. This coupled with unfavorable circumstances of the lizard being startled and the relatively smooth seawall surface presenting a poor surface for purchase likely contributed to this opportunistic predation event.

Submitted by **HENRY T. SMITH**, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Park Service, 13798 S.E. Federal Highway, Hobe Sound, Florida 33455, USA, and **RICHARD M. ENGEMAN**, National Wildlife Research Center, 4101 LaPorte Ave., Fort Collins, Colorado 80521-2154, USA; e-mail: (RME) Richard.M.Engeman@aphis.usda.gov.