

**A Case of Self-cannibalism in a Wild-caught South-Italian Asp Viper,
Vipera aspis hugyi (Squamata: Viperidae)**

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On 27 August 2014 at 1130 h, a female *Vipera aspis hugyi* Schinz, 1834 (18 cm total length) was found in a retrodunal environment (40.003121°N; 18.015930°E, datum WGS84; 4 m asl) between the Mediterranean sea and a pine forest, ca. 6 km SE of Gallipoli town, Lecce Province, southeastern Italy. This taxon was already known from three other localities in Lecce Province (Fattizzo and Marzano, 2002) and its occurrence in this newly recorded locality was not unexpected. The snake was temporarily removed from its habitat because it was surrounded by people and at obvious risk to be killed, with the intention to release it at the same spot a week later. It seemed healthy at the time of its capture, and was kept in a standard terrarium (24–28°C, 70–85% humidity) at the Provincial Wildlife Recovery Center of Lecce (input protocol OFP 331/14). After five days in captivity it was found dead, having ingested more than one-fourth of its own body. It was injected with 90% ethanol then preserved in 70% ethanol and stored at the Museo di Storia naturale del Salento (collection number Rept Ita – 71).

This case represents the first record of self-cannibalism in *Vipera aspis*. Such a suicidal behavior, also called autophagy, has been occasionally observed in snakes but is rarely properly documented (Mitchell et al., 1982; Rossi and Rossi, 2002;

Mattison, 2007). It seems to be often caused by the stress generated by captivity, as is apparently also the case here.

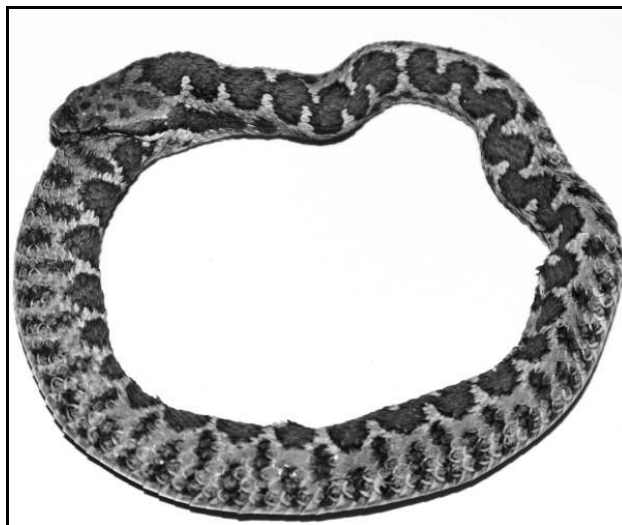


Figure 1. A South-Italian Asp Viper which swallowed more than a quarter of its own body.

Literature Cited

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