

SPIDERS AS HERPETO-EATERS

By: Ton Steehouder, Theresiaplein 24, Tilburg, The Netherlands.

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INTRODUCTION

To eat and to get eaten: that's what is all about in nature. Frogs eat crickets and are in their turn eaten by many other animals, including mankind. It is a well known fact that spiders regularly prey on amphibians and reptiles. In this article I present two examples.

COMMON TREE FROG

Observations of populations of the common tree frog (*Hyla versicolor*) in Maryland (USA) found four recently metamorphosed frogs in webs of the golden spider (*Argiops aurantica*). Two were found in the same web, near a pool. One of these two frogs was probably recently ensnared in the web, as it was only cocooned into a solib ball. The other amphibian had turned black and had begun to decompose. The web and other webs in which frogs were found, were spun between cat tails: plants rising up out of the water. The webs were at a height of 1.2 to 1.5 meters above the water surface.

Observation showed that a lot of frogs climbed out of the water onto the plants, probably into the web by accident. The spider might be glad of such an unexpected visitor, but the frog may have died more of drying up than of spider bite.

NECKLACE SNAKES

Except for common tree frogs, there are also observations of necklace snakes (*Diadophis punctatus edwardsi*) caught in the webs of a spider. In all cases it concerned new born snakes. All victims were found in cellars of houses or near the ground. One observation concerned a snake one meter above the ground, at the top of a flight of steps. The kind of spider is rarely mentioned, but is likely the common house spider (*Theridion spec.*).

How did the snakes get entangled in the webs? It is the irony of fate that spiders and insects are common prey of necklace snakes (though less than worms and salamanders). In all webs hung dead insects, which may have attracted them too.

LITERATURE

Groves J.D., 1978. Spider predation on Amphibians and reptiles. Bull. Maryland Herpetol. Soc. vol 14: 44-46.