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# Sistrurus tergeminus edwardsii (Desert Massasauga). Diet.

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displaced dorsal scales ca. 5 cm from the nuchal region, blood on its broken jaw, and multiple punctures at ca. 1/3 the length of its body. We returned to the site at 1320 h and the snake remained coiled up in the same spot and was marginally responsive. We returned again the following morning at 0800 h and the snake was no longer present.

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**SISTRURUS CATENATUS CATENATUS (Eastern Massasauga) AND NERODIA SIPEDON SIPEDON (Northern Watersnake). DIET AND FOREIGN OBJECT.** We examined the gut contents of *Sistrurus catenatus catenatus* (N = 13) and *Nerodia sipedon sipedon* (N = 17) found dead on a highway in Magnetawan First Nation, Ontario, Canada between 1 May and 31 August 2013. Necropsies determined that 5/13 (38.5%) *S. c. catenatus* and 3/17 (17.6%) *N. s. sipedon* had prey within their digestive systems. For *S. c. catenatus*, all identifiable prey items were parts of small mammals (fur, paws, and bones; average wet mass = 13.64 g), excluding a single adult *Opheodrys vernalis* (Smooth Greensnake), found in the gut of a juvenile *S. c. catenatus* (body size of both snakes could not be measured due to vehicular damage). Prey items identified from *N. s. sipedon* were both fish (whole, scales, and bones; average wet mass = 9.1 g) and unidentified small mammals (bones, tissue, and fur; average wet mass = 8.4 g). A similar (*S. c. catenatus*) or lower (*N. s. sipedon*) percentage of snakes we collected on a roadway had prey within their digestive tracts when compared to previous field studies that examined gut contents in individuals of these snake species collected from sites not associated with roads (Keenlyne and Beer 1973. *J. Herpetol.* 7:383–384; Shepard et al. 2004. *Am. Midl. Nat.* 152:360–368).

Both the presence of small mammal fur within *N. s. sipedon* and an *O. vernalis* within a juvenile *S. c. catenatus* are noteworthy as although these prey items have been documented previously, they are uncommon (Rowell 2012. *The Snakes of Ontario: Natural History, Distribution, and Status.* Art Bookbindery, Winnipeg, Manitoba. 411 pp.). However, an even more interesting item recovered from the necropsies was a fishhook (4.4 cm long) found within the intestines of a male *S. c. catenatus* (Fig. 1). The fishhook appeared to be a small J-hook with barbed end, typically used for fishing with bait. The fishhook had considerable corrosion, either from exposure to water or as a result of the stomach acid of the snake. The diet of adult *S. c. catenatus* is thought to consist predominately of small mammals; however, fish, crayfish, and amphibians have been documented as prey (Rubio 2010. *Rattlesnakes of the United States and Canada.* ECO Herpetological Publishing & Distribution, Rodeo, New Mexico. 307 pp.; Ernst and Ernst 2011. *Venomous Reptiles of the United States, Canada and Northern Mexico.* John Hopkins Univ. Press, Baltimore, Maryland. 352 pp.). As fish are known prey of this species, the snake may have inadvertently ingested the hook while consuming a living or dead fish previously hooked on a fishing line. Partially digested prey, consisting of mammal hair (wet mass = 10.74 g), was also recovered from the gut of this *S. c. catenatus*. The snake appeared to be in good body condition and the presence of relatively fresh prey in the gut suggests that it was still actively feeding despite having a fishing hook lodged in its intestines. To our knowledge this is the first documented account of a fishhook being recovered from the digestive system of *S. c. catenatus*.

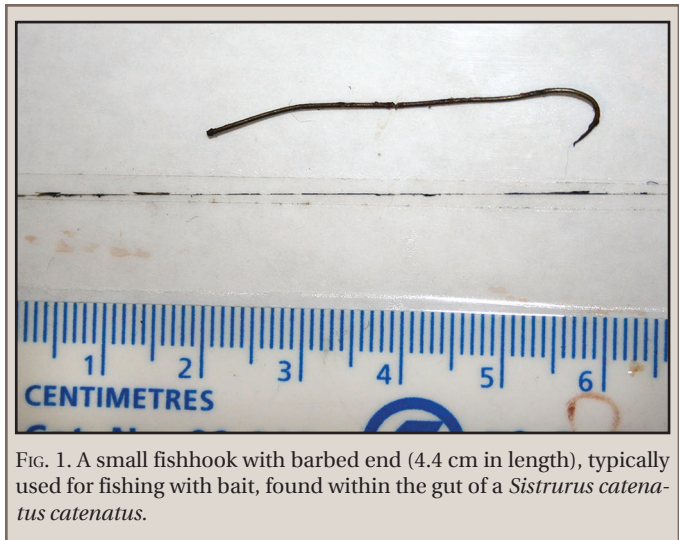


FIG. 1. A small fishhook with barbed end (4.4 cm in length), typically used for fishing with bait, found within the gut of a *Sistrurus catenatus catenatus*.

PHOTO BY P. MOLDOVAN

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**SISTRURUS TERGEMINUS EDWARDSII (Desert Massasauga). DIET.** Massasaugas feed on a variety of prey, including invertebrates, frogs, lizards, and small mammals (Campbell and Lamar 2004. *Venomous Reptiles of the Western Hemisphere.* Comstock Publishing Associates, Ithaca, New York. 870 pp.), and their diet varies across their large geographic distribution. *Sistrurus catenatus* (Eastern Massasauga) feeds primarily on small mammals, while *S. tergeminus* (Western Massasauga) includes more lizards in the diet (Werler and Dixon 2000. *Snakes of Texas.* University of Texas Press, Austin. 437 pp.; Ernst and Ernst 2003. *Snakes of the United States and Canada.* Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington D.C. 668 pp.). At ~ 0030 h on 9 August 2014 we found a recently road-killed *S. tergeminus edwardsii* on U.S. Hwy 90, 17.3 km SE of Valentine, in Presidio Co., Texas, USA (30.48109°N, 104.36359°W; datum WGS84). Upon dissection the snake was found to contain two partially digested individuals of *Aspidoscelis inornata* (Trans-Pecos Striped Whiptail). To our knowledge this species is a novel prey item for *S. tergeminus* (Greene and Oliver 1965. *Herpetologica* 21:226–228; Werler and Dixon 2000, *op. cit.*; Ernst and Ernst 2003, *op. cit.*; Campbell and Lamar 2004, *op. cit.*). The snake and lizards were collected and deposited as SRSU 6616.

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