

Sonoran Whipsnake Consuming a Bat in an Emory Oak Canopy

Sky Jacobs, Wild Sonora, 729 N 10th Ave, Tucson, AZ, skyjacobs@gmail.com

Claire Zugmeyer, Sonoran Institute, 729 N 10th Ave, Tucson, AZ, clairezugmeyer@gmail.com

On 16 August 2026, at around 1210 h, while walking a trail between the Chiricahua National Monument visitor center and Faraway Ranch (approximately 32.009° N, -109.362° W), we began hearing high-pitched noises, which sounded like a small mammal in distress. The source of commotion was approximately 6 m (~20 ft) up an Emory Oak (*Quercus emoryi*). This area was in a narrow valley bottom at 1,612 m (5,289 ft) ele. dominated by dense oak forest with a fairly open understory.

Using binoculars we observed a large Sonoran Whipsnake (*Masticophis bilineatus*) well over 1 m (3.3 ft) in length flailing wildly to hold onto a large brown bat that it had captured with its mouth (Fig. 1). The bat species was not identifiable with certainty to species, but likely a Big Brown Bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*) or possibly a Desert Red Bat (*Lasiurus frantzii*; pers. comm. with Arizona Game and Fish Department).

The bat was vigorously flapping, vocalizing, and attempting escape. A tree cavity was just above the area; however, we did not witness whether the snake pulled the bat from the cavity. The location of the cavity relative to the snake's body and where its body clung to the tree strongly suggests the bat was captured inside the cavity.

Over the course of several minutes, the snake successfully subdued and swallowed the bat. About half an hour later, the snake was still in the same tree in a different location, a large bulge evident along its midsection.

Southwest and Mexico *Masticophis* species *M. schotti*, *M. taeniatus*, and *M. bilineatus* are primarily lizard feeders (Camper and Dixon 2000), but are known opportunistic feeders as well. Only larger individuals of these *Masticophis* species appear to feed on mammals, and relatively infrequently (Camper and Dixon 2000). *Masticophis taeniatus* and *M. flagellum* have been documented actively foraging and feeding on bats in central Texas cave systems (Herreid 1961).

While many snake species are known to feed on bats (chiroptophagy; Sparks 2000), Sonoran Whipsnake (*Masticophis bilineatus*), specifically, appears to have no such records. Also, this method of foraging and capture of a bat by *Masticophis* from a tree cavity may be rarely seen and likely not documented.



Fig. 1. Sonoran Whipsnake (*Masticophis bilineatus*) predating a bat within an Emory Oak (*Quercus emoryi*). Photo by S. Jacobs.

Literature Cited

- Camper, J.D., and J.R. Dixon. 2000. Food habits of three species of striped whipsnakes, *Masticophis* (Serpentes: Colubridae). *Texas Journal of Science* 52:83-92.
- Herreid, C.F. 1961. Snakes as Predators of Bats. *Herpetologica* 17:271-272.
- Sparks, D.W. 2000. Vertebrate Predators on Bats in North America North of Mexico. Pp. 229-241 in: *Reflections of a Naturalist: Papers Honoring Professor Eugene D. Fleharty*, Fort Hays Studies Series 69.



Southwest and Mexico *Masticophis* species *M. schotti*, *M. taeniatus*, and *M. bilineatus* are primarily lizard feeders (Camper and Dixon 2000), but are known opportunistic feeders as well. Only larger individuals of these *Masticophis* species appear to feed on mammals, and relatively infrequently (Camper and Dixon 2000).