



***Hersilia* sp. feeding on *Scolopendra* sp.**

Spiders are efficient hunters that prey on a variety of invertebrates and vertebrates (Pekár & Toft 2015). They rely on strategies varying from the use of toughened silk (Agnarsson *et al.* 2010) to venom (Mourão *et al.* 2013). The genus *Hersilia* Audouin 1826 is called two-tailed spiders due to its characteristic long spinnerets. It is distributed across the Afrotropical, Oriental and Australasian realms (Mondal *et al.* 2020). Currently there are five species known to occur in India (Javed *et al.* 2010, Sen *et al.* 2010): *Hersilia savignyi* Lucas 1836, *H. sumatrana* Thorell 1890, *H. tibialis* Baehr & Baehr 1993, *H. orvakalensis* Javed, Foord & Tampil 2010, and *H. longivulva* Sen, Saha & Raychaudhuri 2010.

At 18:00 hrs on Jan 09, 2021, we observed a *Hersilia* sp. consuming a centipede on a tree trunk, in Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary (15.587524° N, 74.190261° E, elevation 200 m ASL), Nagargaon, North Goa, India. The spider was on a tree trunk in a head-down position about 1m above the ground. The centipede was immobile, wrapped in silk, and held by the spider in its chelicerae (Fig. 1). When disturbed by our presence, the spider moved higher on the tree, dragging the centipede with it. The centipede was identified from images as a member of the family Scolopendridae (*Scolopendra* sp.) (*pers. comm.* Dr. Jahnvi Joshi, Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, July 2021).

Centipedes are generally not known to form part of the diet of spiders, though instances of their predation have been reported in some species (Bristowe 1941, Cloudsley-Thompson 1949, Lewis 1981). *Scolopendra* sp. in particular are formidable hunters that are known to predate vertebrates, including toads, snakes, birds, mice (Lewis 1981) and bats (Molinari 2005). They are equipped with venomous forcipules and secondary defence mechanisms such as chemical secretions and venom-bearing telopodites

(Lewis 1981, Cloudsley-Thompson 1996). Records of predation on centipedes from the order Scolopendromorpha are mostly restricted to vertebrates, though two exceptions involve spiders from the family Theridiidae: an immature *Theridion* sp. feeding on a *Cryptops hortensis* (Cloudsley-Thompson 1949) and a *Latrodectus* sp. feeding on a *Cormocephalus* sp. (Rosa *et al.* 2016).



Figure 1: *Hersilia* sp. holding the silk-wrapped *Scolopendra* centipede

We believe our observation to be the first record of a *Hersilia* sp. feeding on a *Scolopendra* centipede. Due to limited literature on the natural history and venom of the genus *Hersilia*, we refrain from commenting on the plausible reasons and practicality of the predation. Focussed studies to understand the dietary spectrum of spiders could shed light on their predatory behaviour and role in the food web.

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