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ARBOREALITY IN A NORTHERN BROWNSNAKE (*STORERIA DEKAYI DEKAYI*) IN VIRGINIA -- North American snakes are often grouped according to their generalized habitat type, such as aquatic, semiaquatic, terrestrial, and arboreal. Not all snakes adhere to these human constructs, however, as several species that have been considered primarily terrestrial have been found well off the ground in vegetation. Arboreal behavior has been documented in Black Racers (*Coluber constrictor*), Timber Rattlesnakes (*Crotalus horridus*), Copperheads (*Agkistrodon contortrix*), western Gartersnakes (*Thamnophis* spp.), and Crowned Snakes (*Tantilla* spp.) in the modern literature (Liner & Chaney, 1990; Saenz et al., 1996; Mitchell et al., 2000; Beaupre & Roberts, 2001; Fogell et al., 2002; Leenders, 2004; Sajdak & Bartz, 2004). Observations of such behavior provide insights into the life histories and ecology of these snakes that occasionally cause us to rewrite our books.

Arboreality in the Northern Brownsnake (*S. dekayi*) has been documented three times; all in North Carolina. One was observed apparently basking about 1.4 m above ground in a hedge and another was coiled 61 cm above ground in a sapling (Palmer & Braswell, 1995). Brown (1992) noted that gravid females are sometimes found in branches and vines overhanging streams. Hunley (2003) found one of these snakes basking on a mound of soil on 21 March in Botetourt County, Virginia.

On 7 May 2005, one of us (PP) observed a female *S. dekayi* (246 mm TL) lying on a Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) vine about 44 cm above ground in full sun, 3.1 km SW of the Danville Regional Airport in the City of Danville, Virginia (36° 33' 35.4" N, 79° 21' 22.6" W, elevation 111 m). This vine was located beside a mountain bike trail cut through a mature oak-hickory forest. The trail allowed sufficient light through the canopy to sustain an herbaceous layer composed



Fig. 1. Northern Brownsnake basking on *Lonicera japonica* in the City of Danville, Virginia. Photo by J. Gibson.

of *L. japonica*, *Rubus* sp. (Blackberry), *Vitis* sp. (Grapevine), *Toxicodendron radicans* (Poison Ivy), and *Galium aparine* (Bedstraw). The snake appeared to be basking, an arboreal behavior consistent with that described by Brown (1992). While taking photographs of the snake (Fig. 1), it tongue flicked many times but exhibited no other behaviors. It quickly entered the leaf litter when placed on the ground. Reports and descriptions of arboreality in terrestrial snakes are potentially useful because they provide insights into little known behaviors of these secretive animals.

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