

LITHOBATES SYLVATICUS (Wood Frog). NECROPHILIA. Mating attempts directed toward deceased conspecifics have been documented in a handful of anuran species and are typically associated with explosive breeders. In at least one frog species, this behavior can result in the successful production of offspring when a male extracts and fertilizes the eggs of a dead female, and is thus considered “functional necrophilia” (Izzo et al. 2012. J. Nat. Hist. 46:2961–2967). Male anurans are also known to occasionally mistake other frog species and even salamanders for conspecific females during explosive reproductive events, suggesting that not all instances of necrophilia are functional in origin (Simovic et al. 2014. Herpetol. Notes 7:25–29). This account describes an observation of necrophilic behavior in *Lithobates sylvaticus*.

At 2135 h on 24 March 2020, I observed an adult male *L. sylvaticus* in amplexus with a deceased female (Fig. 1) in a vernal pool located off S Rd. in Kingston, Rhode Island, USA (41.47231°N, 71.52616°W; WGS 84; 21 m elev.). The pair were found at a water depth of 17.2 cm on a relatively cool evening (air temperature = 4.3°C, water temperature = 8.7°C) during which only a small number of frogs were active in the pond. Growth of water mold on the face of the female suggested that she had been dead for more than a day; she was also missing half the left forelimb and both of her hindlimbs, with an egg mass expanding outward from the posterior injury (Fig. 2). When the pair were removed from the water to document the condition of the female, the male frog vocalized persistently and remained in



FIG. 1. Male *Lithobates sylvaticus* in amplexus with a deceased female and her eggs in Rhode Island, USA.



FIG. 2. Ventral view of damage to the limbs of the deceased female *Lithobates sylvaticus*; note exposed egg mass.

amplexus while repeatedly kicking his hindlimbs in an apparent attempt to prevent interference by intruders.

It is unclear whether this observation constitutes an instance of functional necrophilia in *L. sylvaticus* or simply a fitness-reducing behavior, though it is clear that the male had access to the eggs of the deceased female and that successful fertilization may have been possible. Furthermore, the occurrence of this event on a night when few other *L. sylvaticus* were active indicates that the behavior was not the result of a chaotic breeding frenzy. A lone deceased female *L. sylvaticus* observed at the same vernal pool eleven days prior (2018 h on 13 March 2020) displayed identical hindlimb injuries and similar exposure of the previously internal egg mass, though it is unknown how these injuries came about, or whether they occurred before or after the death of the frog. Taken together, these observations warrant further investigation into the possibility of functional necrophilia as a reproductive strategy in *L. sylvaticus*.

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