

Letter

Jequitiranabóia, the flying snake

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Dear Editor:

Jequitiranabóias are winged, nocturnal insects of the order Homoptera, Family Fulgoridae, and genus *Fulgora* (Linnaeus, 1758)¹⁻³. The most common species is *Fulgora laternaria*. They belong to a group of cicadas that are known by a variety of names, including tiranabóias, machacas (Spanish), flying snakes, alligator-headed lantern fly, lantern bugs, and peanut-headed bugs (English)¹. They are often sighted throughout the tropics of South America^{2,3}.

These insects are around 8cm in diameter when the wings are closed and twice this size when the wings are open. The cephalic segment has a unique chitinous formation that resembles the head of a reptile (alligator or snake) with false teeth (**Figure 1**). This structure may exhibit bioluminescence, which reinforces the perception that these insects are dangerous. They also have ocelli on the hind wings, which simulate the eyes of a bird and repels predators. When on the ground, they walk back and to the side^{2,3}.

In wilderness regions, many believe the insect is extremely dangerous and highly venomous. Indigenous legends claim that if the insect lands on a person or tree, its venom will cause the tree or the human to dry out and die⁴. In Costa Rica, jungle dwellers believe that if a young person is stung by this insect, they must have sex within 24h or they will die³. The creed may originate from the insects' formidable appearance and since they usually land on dry trunks⁵.

These insects are found in forests and are greatly feared by inhabitants and workers in the forests. The ideas about this insect were likely inherited from the Indians; in the Tupi-Guarani language, *iaki* means cicada, *rana* means alike, and *mboia* is the word for snake. The *cicada-snake* feeds on vegetable sap and

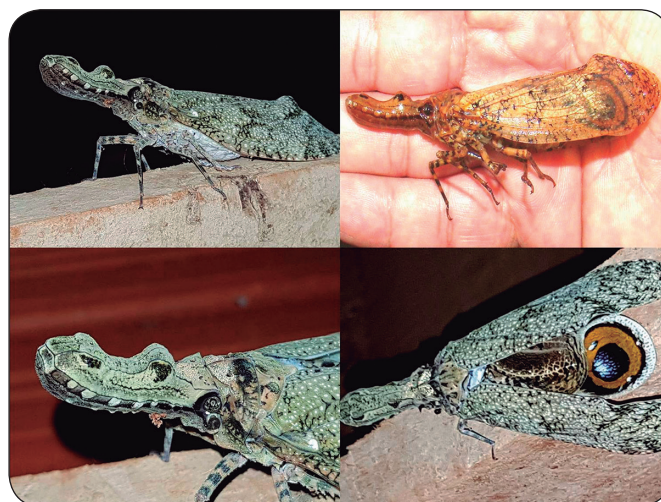


FIGURE 1: The jequitiranabóia, or flying snake, has a reptile-like head, and the ocelli contribute to the perception that this insect is dangerous even though it is a harmless cicada.

fruit nectar with a sucking device, which is considered a stinger but is devoid of venom and is actually harmless.

The fear and lack of information about these insects can cause problems when people come in contact with the insect. There are reports of administering antiofidic serum to patients exposed to the insect, which is without basis or reason⁵. It is important to make the general population and health personnel aware that this insect is harmless, and there are no negative consequences if one comes in contact with the insect⁴⁻⁶.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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