

Biannually deciduous reptilian organs used as foodstuffs by indigenous villagers

Anthony Laurel

Littleroot Town Research Laboratory, Saga Prefecture, Japan

Abstract

Endemic animals contribute to dietary diversity in many cultures. The Rokotsuna Uso people of the Hoenn island chain of Miyazaki Prefecture, Japan are one example, eating what is referred to as the fruit of Tropius (Fructusaurus alatus Birch 2002). Notably, Tropius is not a plant but a reptile, and its “fruit” is actually a highly specialized, biannually deciduous external organ. The yellow crescent-shaped “fruit” always grows in clusters of three, ventral to the axis. They reach full size after four months of growth, after which they can be gently pulled off of the animal without causing injury, and new fruit begin to grow two months after the fruit are picked. The most likely function of the fruit is to increase its survival rate when living with omnivores, like humans, that could potentially hunt Tropius. When humans first arrive in a new habitat, the populations of large fauna typically decrease or are extirpated due to hunting. As *F. alatus* are three times the mass of the next largest species found in its habitat, it would be at great risk of extinction if not for its fruit. Strikingly, this risk is present even though Tropius are not known to exist outside of a prominent media franchise. The fruit are prized as a local delicacy, and are especially enjoyed by children for their pleasant, sweet flavor, further supporting this hypothesis.

Biography

Laurel is a researcher at the littleroot town research laboratory, where he studies natural history, speciation, and ecology with James Birch. Prior to this, he was a visiting researcher at the oreburgh mining museum and a postdoctoral researcher at the devon corporation. He has a BA and MA in biology from nacrene college, and a Ph.D in biology from Slateport university, where he completed his doctoral thesis, “an overview of the monstrasinu fossil record.” He has previously presented research at the oreburgh mining museum, the nacrene museum, the pewter museum of science, and the oceanic museum.

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