Reptiles of Soldado Rock, Trinidad

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SOLDADO ROCK lies approximately 5 km due west of the south-western peninsula of Trinidad. Visits to this rock over the years by the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists’ Club have been made, and the flora and fauna noted.

The first mention of a reptile on Soldado rock was by Richard ffrench when he lectured to the Club on September, 19 1969. This reptile was the Common Iguana, Iguana iguana. Though the iguana is recognised as a vegetarian, ffrench (1969) noted that it eats the eggs of the Sooty Tern, Sterna fuscata fuscata, and the Noddy Tern, Anous stolidus, which nest on Soldado Rock from March to June. He also noted the four species of plant found there.* These are the only land based plant food available to the resident iguanas. ffrench queried the food available to the resident iguanas as well, on which the iguanas can feed. Iguanas are mainly of the Water Hyacinth. Eichhornia crassipes and Water Lettuce Pistia stratiotes, they most likely provide sufficient other vegetation as well, on which the iguanas can feed. Iguanas are more than likely carried to Soldado Rock on these floating food-stores.

The expedition to Soldado Rock by the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists’ Club on March, 28 1982, revealed that not only were the iguanas still present and surviving, for one specimen was caught, examined, photographed and released, but that another reptile had managed to reach this barren rock, most likely as a passenger too, on the rafts of north-westerly drifting plants and debris.

A small gecko, a female of the species Sphaerodactylus molei was collected (V. Quesnel 1982) under loose rocks on the eastern slope of the rock. Searches failed to turn up any more. This specimen was photographed and preserved.

Thus the list of reptiles of Soldado Rock is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Genus</th>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>iguanidae</td>
<td>Iguana</td>
<td>Iguana iguana</td>
<td>Soldado Rock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gekkonidae</td>
<td>Sphaerodactylus</td>
<td>molei</td>
<td>Soldado Rock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>molei</td>
<td>Boettger</td>
<td></td>
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Isolation on such a small rock with a restricted, chancy and seasonal food supply must put great pressure on the population of iguanas there and must prompt them to utilize their swimming prowess to secure food at times from the sea. Rafts of vegetation sweeping past or washed up near the island on the many exposed reefs must tempt the iguanas to secure this food by swimming to get it.

Evidence of this was the young iguana found in the stomach of a grouper caught by my father fishing on the reefs off Soldado Rock in the 1950s.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


* On the club’s visit on 28 March 1982 five species of plant were found: Eleusine indica, Plumbago standens, Paspalum vaginatum, Mariscus ligularis and Portulacca oleracea. E.d.