THE REDISCOVERY OF THE YELLOW-TAILED CRIBO
DRYMARCHON C. CORAIS IN TRINIDAD

By Hans Boos
(Emperor Valley Zoo, Port-of-Spain).

The snake fauna of Trinidad is little known by the general public. The
commoner types are seen with varying frequency, and their names are
fairly well known. Others, on account of their secretive nature, choice of
habitat, or rarity, are seldom seen.

One of the strangest cases of a snake that, from all appearances and
reports should be fairly common, and thus well known to collectors in
Trinidad, is the Yellow-Tailed Cribro, Drymarchon c. corais.

It is a large, black, swift-moving jungle snake, which cannot be
confused with the other two similar snakes, the Tigre, Spilotes p. pullatus, or
the Yellow-Bellied Puffer, Pseustes s. sulphureus in that it has the dis-
tinctive yellow tail which accounts for about 1/3 of its overall length,
as well as its common name.

R. R. Mole, in 'Snakes of Trinidad' published in the "Gazette" in
1926, states that he had caught them, up in the St. Ann Valley, as
well as Monos Island. He admits however that, "in fact all Cribos are
rare now, and one has not been seen for years." He says that his sightings
were "fifteen or twenty years ago", which would be early in this century.

During my association with the late Ludolph Wehekind, when he was
curator of the Royal Victoria Institute, he told me that he was not sure
he had ever seen one, and if so, not for at least thirty years, and that
they were probably very rare.

However, in 1966 there came a report from an estate in the North of
Mayaro that a snake with a startlingly yellow tail had been killed some
years before. Another report which described a snake looking as if it
had the end half of a bright yellow one stuck on in place of its original
black one, came from someone who had seen it dead on the Manzanilla
Road.

Checks in the bottled collection at the Royal Victoria Institute
proved fruitless, and the one held in the collection of the Regional
Virus Lab. turned out to be a Tigre, Spilotes.

Reports from Tobago said that the Yellow-Tailed Cribro was common,
and was well known. Elliot Olton chased what he described as a
long black snake with a yellow tail, but lost it in a thorn patch at
Speyside. But no specimen had come to hand in spite of these reports.
Then on 8th June 1974, Dr. Chris Everard called from the Virus Lab.
to say that he had what looked like a Yellow-Tail, and would I come
and identify. There was no doubt in my mind the minute I saw it, for
they are quite common in Guyana, and I had seen two huge specimens
there in 1961. Finally, Drymarchon c. corais had made its re-
appearance. Chris had caught this specimen just inside the Turunc Forest
in Sangre Grande, lying coiled on the bog-forest floor. Three days later.
Allan Rodrigues from Sangre Grande called and told me he had caught
a large black snake with a yellow tail. I saw it at his home on July 22nd
and confirmed that it was another Yellow-Tailed Cribro. Incredibly, this
was the second one caught and identified in such a short time, and
perhaps the only two recorded for this century.

Since this "rediscovery" Derek Oudit of the Central Marketing
Agency has assured me that this snake was caught by his men on the
banks of the Caroni River behind Centeno in an abandoned coffee es-
state in 1967. It was killed before it could be identified or recorded.

The Yellow-Tailed Cribro competes with the Yellow-Bellied Puffer
Snake as the largest Colubrid in Trinidad. They are both swift-moving
aggressive snakes in the wild, eating small mammals and birds and are
famed for their ability to eat the Mapupue Balins and Z'arama.

A BIRD VISITOR FROM FINLAND

by Richard Sjöblom
(St. Peter's School, T.T.I., Pointe-a-Pierre).

A most interesting and unusual record was recently brought to my
notice through the kindness of Roland Stav, a Swedish ornithologist
who visited Trinidad and Tobago late in 1974.

On 8 February 1970 Mr. Joseph Nandalal discovered on the sea-
coast at Chaguaramus, Trinidad, a bird which he called a "seagull" -- a
popular local name for any white seabird. It was exhausted and hungry
and he cared for its leg bone a ring (or band) with a number which
Mr. Nandalal sensibly reported. It turns out that the bird was a Common
Tern, Sterna hirundo, ringed as a nestling by Mr. Olof Sjöblom on 2
July 1968 at Trutgrund, Korpo, Finland. This place seems to be an
island just off S.W. Finland, situated at 60.04 north latitude and 21.39
east longitude, some 7000 miles by direct flight from Trinidad.

Though Mr. Sjöblom was not sure whether the nestling he ringed
was a Common Tern or possibly the very similar Arctic Tern, Sterna
paradisaea, it seems likely for several reasons that the former identi-
fication is correct.