
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 French when he lectured to the Club on September, 19 1969. This reptile was the Common Iguana, *Iguana iguana iguana*. Though the iguana is recognised as a vegetarian, French (1969) noted that it eats the eggs of the Sooty Tern, *Sterna fuscata fuscata*, and the Noddy Tern, *Anous stolidus 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. French queried the food and survival of the iguanas during the months when there were no eggs available. However beside the four plants some of which may be unpalatable to iguanas, from July to December great rafts of floating vegetation are swept out of the Orinoco River Delta and many of these rafts must make land-fall on Soldado Rock, which stands in the middle of the Serpents Mouth passage, through which strong currents sweep (Field 1975) and the prevailing winds for these months funnel. Though these rafts consist mainly of the Water Hyacinth · *Eichhornia crassipes crassipes* and Water Lettuce *Pistia stratiotes 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 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:

Family: Iguanidae

Iguana iguana iguana (Linnaeus)

Iguana

Family: Gekkonidae

Sphaerodactylus molei molei Boettger

Mole's Gecko

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.

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