

Some recent animal colonizations

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FROM time to time, there have appeared in the popular press reports of strange animals being seen or collected in Trinidad. Notable amongst these was the newspaper story on a tapir roaming the forests in south Trinidad. Over the years also, there have been occasional sightings of a capybara and a mata mata. There is no doubt that conditions are such in the Orinoco delta, that at certain times of the year, particularly during the rainy season, animals of continental origin may cross the Columbus Channel or the Serpent's Mouth. There is no doubt, however, that in the case of larger animals, these occasional introductions have never been in numbers large enough to support breeding and successful colonization.

This note reports on four comparatively recent colonizations in which some breeding has actually taken place, and three of these appear to have been successful.

Price (1955) recorded the presence of the keyhole cichlid (*Aequidens maronii*) in a small catchment at Buenos Ayres in South Trinidad. These fish have been collected up until 1965. In 1974, however, extensive efforts were made to collect the species without success and it is now presumed to have become extinct.

Price also recorded the presence in the Maraval river of the liberty molly (*Mollienisia sphenops*). This fish may still be collected in this drainage.

While evidence is purely circumstantial, it is concluded that the introduction of liberty molly, must have been accidental, and through the agency of man. This species's range does not extend to North Eastern South America and it is a popular aquarium fish.

Aequidens maronii does occur in North Eastern South America and it is not unreasonable to accept that it moved to South Trinidad accidentally, perhaps during a period of heavy flooding of the Orinoco river, or possibly by being transported in a raft of vegetation such as are frequently seen in the Pedernales. In fact, the peculiar distribution of some of our fresh-water fishes, particularly *Moenkhausia* and *Gasteropelecus*, would support the idea of continued colonization of fresh waters in South Western Trinidad from the Orinoco, since the separation of Trinidad from the mainland.

Two new colonizations can now be reported. I am particularly indebted to Mr. Hans Boos, Curator of the Emperor Valley

Zoo, for drawing to my attention the presence of the tree frog, *Eleutherodactylus martinicensis*. This frog, a native of the islands from Grenada to Dominica, has been deliberately introduced into Barbados and Jamaica where they have successfully colonised human habitation and agricultural areas. The whistling call of this frog is distinctive and calling persists throughout the year. Mr. Boos noticed the call of several individuals in the docks area in Port of Spain, particularly near the number I shed.

In mid-July and again in mid-August, I spent several hours observing these frogs, and there is no doubt that they are well established from the CARIFTA Jetty to about the post office. It should be of great interest to naturalists to observe the likely spread of these frogs across Wrightson Road into lower Port-of-Spain. During my field observations, I was able to estimate a male population of about thirty individuals and I observed five females. I did not, however, see any juveniles, but this is not surprising for these frogs produce a terrestrial egg which is usually secreted in rotting wood, or rubbish.

There is no doubt that this introduction is through the agency of man. Trinidad is beyond the range of this species of frog and it is very easy to see how eggs or adults could be brought into Trinidad via produce being transported in inter-island shipping.

The other successful recent colonisation is that of the ground dwelling frog *Leptodactylus macrosternum*. A breeding colony of this species was discovered at a small swamp at Icaos in 1975. Visits have been made each year since then and the colony continues to breed but is still apparently confined to the small swamp and the adjacent coconut estates. An account of this is given by Kenny (1977).

REFERENCES:

- KENNY, J.S. 1977: The Amphibia of Trinidad -- An addendum. Journ. Stud. Fauna Curacao, Vol. 51, 92-95.
- PRICE, J.L. 1955: A Survey of the Fresh Water Fishes of the island of Trinidad. Journ. Agr. Soc. Trin. Tob. 28pp.