

ENVIRONMENT

Not an alligator but a spectacled caiman

SOME people are terrified of them. Some people like to keep them as pets. Love them or hate them, one of the better known animals in Trinidad and Tobago is the spectacled caiman. While it is more commonly referred to as "alligator", this is not technically correct - the caimans are related to alligators but form their own sub-family and are generally smaller in size. Like their larger relatives, caimans are carnivores and eat a range of animal matter including fish, water birds, mollusks, prawns and insects. They will also eat rotting meat as readily as fresh meat.

The spectacled caiman is found throughout South and Central America and on both Trinidad and Tobago, where it inhabits a wide range of freshwater and brackish water environments including ponds, water reservoirs and drains. They can be found quite close to towns and villages, often going unnoticed by passers-by. It has been suggested that the spectacled caimans of Tobago belong to a different subspecies from those found in Trinidad, the Tobago form being smaller on average than their Trinidadian kin.

The spectacled caiman can grow to an average length of two metres. Its upper-parts are dark greenish/black in colour while its undersides are pale. It gets its name from the bony ridge above its eye that looks almost as if it was wearing glasses.

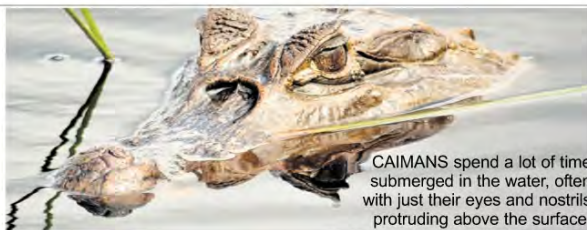
In fact, it is often the case that this is all you can see of a caiman as they spend a lot of time submerged in the water with just its

eyes and nostrils protruding above the surface. You can,

however, get a look at the entire caiman when it leaves the

water to sun itself on land.

● CAIMAN continues on Page 8B



CAIMANS spend a lot of time submerged in the water, often with just their eyes and nostrils protruding above the surface.

Sunshine Snacks
Put A Little Sunshine In Your Day!

Combo Pack

NOW
20
Packs

BIGGER Pack

BIGGER Savings

SAVE
\$12

ENVIRONMENT

Caimans are harmless, unless nesting

●CAIMAN from Page 7B

Being a reptile, caimans are incapable of controlling their internal body temperature. As they spend a lot of time submerged in water, they are constantly losing body heat to their cold environment and must occasionally sun themselves in order to absorb the sun's heat and get their bodies back to the optimum operating temperature.

Caimans must also leave the water in order to lay their eggs, and this usually takes place in the dry season. They do this in large piles of rotting vegetation which they scrape together on dry land fairly close to the water's edge.

The rotting vegetation provides the warmth that the



IT is not uncommon to see caimans sunning themselves in order to absorb the sun's heat and get their bodies back to the optimum operating temperature.

eggs will need to hatch successfully. It is at this time of year that a caiman can

become aggressive to humans as it stays close to the nest in order to protect it

from predators.

Otherwise, spectacled caimans do not really pose a threat to humans. Most will quickly disappear under the water if you try to get too close. In fact, you are often only aware that a caiman is nearby because of the splash it makes when it dives noisily into the safety of the water.

Humans, on the other hand, can pose a threat to caimans. Caimans that reside too close to settlements may often be killed out of fear or genuine concern for pets and livestock. They are

also occasionally killed by cars as they cross roadways and it is not uncommon to see the remains of a caiman on the highway near the Caroni Bird Sanctuary.

The spectacled caiman is legally hunted in some parts of the country although it is not as popular as other types of wild-caught meat.

Additionally, young caimans are sometimes kept as pets. Of course, under the present hunting moratorium, capturing or killing caimans is prohibited.

Despite this persecution, the spectacled caiman continues to thrive and is likely to remain a familiar sight in Trinidad and Tobago for a long time to come.

Today's feature was written by Kris Sookdeo.

For more information on our natural environment, you can contact the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club at admin@ttfnc.org or visit our website at www.ttfnc.org. The club's next monthly meeting will be held on February 12, 2015 at St Mary's College, Port-of-Spain.

This month's lecture: The Sargassum event and the RGB algae of Trinidad and Tobago by Lori Lee Lum of the Institute of Marine Affairs.

Trincity Mall

Hot 93
93.5 ...the Hits
Carnival Burn
Southern Car Park • 3:00pm

Shop Spin & Win!

Saturday 7th February, 2015
Radio Shack Atrium
From 12:00 noon

Carnival Monologues & Dance by Steven Edwards Productions between 1:00pm - 3:00pm

Spend \$100.00 and over at any store, which entitles you for ONE chance to spin the wheel & win a prize. Only Bills dated Feb 7th, 2015 will be accepted.

Approved by the NLCB

Passage to Asia
ALL INCLUSIVE FETE 2015

Sunday February 8th 2015
Trinidad Hilton Poolside
4:00pm to 10:00pm

Performances By
Asylum Family feat. (Burji Gartin, Fay Ann Lyons-Alvarez)
Karma feat. Ravi 'B'
K1 & 3 Veni feat. Nishard M
Veekash Sahadeo
Iwer George
Rhythm Section
Tassa
DJ Sheriff
PRICE \$1,100.00

TICKETS AVAILABLE
PASSAGE TO ASIA RESTAURANT, XTRA FOOD - GRAND BAZAAR, ARIMA, CHAGUANAS, CLAS-SIC LIMITED SUPERMARKET, PRAMSINGH, DJ SHERIFF, DAVE SEEBALACK HARDWARE - PENAL, S. SEEPERSAD HARDWARE - MARABELLA, WIN ELECTRONICS - PRICE PLAZA & CENTRE CITY MALL

SPONSORS: [Logos for various sponsors]