

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

By Hans Boos

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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 Cribó, *Drymarchon c. corais*.

It is a large, black, swift-moving jungle snake, which cannot be confused with the two other similar ones, the Tigre, *Spilotes p. pullatus*, or the Yellow-Bellied Puffer, *Pseustes s. sulphureus* in that it has the distinctive 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. Anns 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-Tail Cribó 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 June 4th, 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 1967. Finally, *Drymarchon c. corais* had made its reappearance. Chris had caught this specimen just inside the Turure Forest in Sangre Grande, lying coiled on the bog-forest floor. Three days later, Allan Rodriguez 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 Cribo. 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 estate in 1967. It was killed before it could be identified or recorded.

The Yellow-Tailed Cribo competes with the Yellow-Bellied Puffing 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 Mapepire Balsin and Z'anana.