

LIVING WORLD

Journal of the Trinidad and Tobago

Field Naturalists' Club

admin@tffnc.org

ISSN 1029-3299



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

Range Expansion of the Neotropical Whiptail Lizard, *Cnemidophorus lemniscatus* (L. 1758) (Reptilia: Sauria: Teiidae) on the North Coast of Trinidad

Stevland P. Charles

Charles, S.P. 2009. A Range Expansion of the Neotropical Whiptail Lizard, *Cnemidophorus lemniscatus* (L. 1758) (Reptilia: Sauria: Teiidae) on the North Coast of Trinidad. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 2009, 39-39.

NATURE NOTES

Range Expansion of the Neotropical Whiptail Lizard, *Cnemidophorus lemniscatus* (L. 1758) (Reptilia: Sauria: Teiidae) on the North Coast of Trinidad

The Neotropical whiptail lizard *Cnemidophorus lemniscatus* (Linnaeus 1758) is a small teiid that ranges widely from Guatemala to northern South America (into Brazil) and many of the associated continental islands, including Trinidad and Tobago (Murphy 1997). This lizard is a beach-savannah species. They prefer open sunny areas and rarely venture into deep forests. In Trinidad and Tobago, there is the potential to confuse *Cnemidophorus lemniscatus* with the locally more common and more well-known *Ameiva ameiva* (L. 1758) or Zandolie (Boos and Quesnel 1968). *C. lemniscatus* has a much more restricted range in Trinidad and Tobago than does *A. ameiva*. Here I report a new locality record for *C. lemniscatus* in Trinidad.

I visited the village of L'anse Noire (N 10°50.148', W 060°58.794') on the north coast of Trinidad from 4 to 6 July, 2008 and searched for amphibians and reptiles in the area between L'anse Noire and Sans Souci. Over the course of my time there, I recorded at least five sightings of *Cnemidophorus lemniscatus* (four adult females and one juvenile, all in roadside low grass and leaf litter within a 600 m stretch straddling the 51.5 km post marker along the Paria Main Road). All animals were seen between 1035 h and 1430 h.

Although several *Ameiva ameiva* were observed in the area over the 3-day period, there is no doubt that the identification of the *Cnemidophorus lemniscatus* is correct. The author is very familiar with both species and has no trouble in distinguishing the two from each other. The animals noted as *C. lemniscatus* were each seen in good light at close quarters (less than 5 m) and exhibited the species characteristic behavior of lifting and vibrating a single front leg (not associated with *A. ameiva*) (Murphy 1997). No animals were captured to serve as voucher specimens.

Boos (1984) speculates that *Cnemidophorus lemniscatus* is a geologically recent colonist on Trinidad and Tobago. He reasoned that its occurrence only on the south and east coasts of Trinidad, its presence on Chacachacare Island and Huevos Island in the Bocas and in coastal southwestern Tobago, and its absence (at the time) from

suitable coastal habitats on western and northern Trinidad indicate that it did not have enough time to disperse into and colonize the latter mentioned areas. Boos (1984) notes that (on the east coast) he had not observed them as far north as Toco Point (Pt. Galera), or on any of the suitable beaches on the north coast. Murphy (1997) notes a museum specimen collected from the vicinity of the 21.75 milepost on the Matura-Toco Road on the east coast, but does not give any north coast localities for the species. It seems unlikely that this normally easily observed species was previously missed and it is probable that this record represents a natural range expansion, with possible land dispersal from the east coast, around Pt. Galera and westward along the north coast. It would be useful to conduct intensive surveys of the area between Matura Bay and L'anse Noire, as well as further west along the north coast of Trinidad to get a more detailed understanding of the local distribution of the species.

I thank the Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for approval of animal research permits, Dr. George A. Middendorf III for field equipment and advice, Mr. Michael Benacia and Ms. Melissa Charles for transportation and housing and most importantly my family for their great logistics and moral support.

REFERENCES

- Boos, H. E. A.** 1984. A consideration of the terrestrial reptile fauna on some offshore islands northwest of Trinidad. *Living World, Journal of The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club*, 1983-1984: 19-26.
- Boos, H.** and **Quesnel, V.** 1968. Reptiles of Trinidad and Tobago. Ministry of Education and Culture, Trinidad and Tobago. 39 p.
- Murphy, J. C.** 1997. Amphibians and Reptiles of Trinidad and Tobago. Florida: Krieger. 245 p.

Stevland P. Charles

Dept. of Biology, Howard University,
Washington D.C., U.S.A.
stevlandcharles@gmail.com