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## **First Record of the Opossum *Didelphis marsupialis* from the Island of Gaspar Grande off North-Western Trinidad, Trinidad and Tobago**

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## First Record of the Opossum *Didelphis marsupialis* from the Island of Gaspar Grande off North-Western Trinidad, Trinidad and Tobago

The black-eared opossum *Didelphis marsupialis* Linnaeus (Mammalia: Didelphimorphia: Didelphidae) ranges from Mexico to north-eastern Argentina (Redford and Eisenberg 1992) and parts of the Lesser Antilles. In Trinidad and Tobago where it is called the manicou, it is still fairly common throughout both islands and can be found in a variety of habitats including primary and secondary forests, agricultural areas and urban yards.

At mid-morning on 14 June, 2011 during a search for reptiles in a limestone sinkhole at Pointe Baleine on the island of Gaspar Grande, we observed an adult male *Didelphis marsupialis* in a lateral cavity about 20 cm wide and about one metre deep in the rock wall near the lip of the sinkhole. We watched and video recorded the animal for less than a minute before it moved up into a vertical shaft and out of view.

Gaspar Grande is a small satellite island about 133 hectares in area and 975 m off the north-western peninsula of Trinidad. The island is covered by tropical deciduous seasonal forest and fringed by many holiday homes and guest houses. Our 2011 observation of *Didelphis marsupialis*, coupled with a previous report of 'manicous on the island' by a long time owner of a Gaspar Grande holiday home (SPC 2007, pers. obs.), suggest that a population of these opossums is resident on the island. However, we were unable to discover any published records of wild native non-volant mammals on Gaspar Grande.

Boos (1990) recorded *Didelphis marsupialis* from the nearby satellite island of Monos. Our record is the first for the species on Gaspar Grande. Although recent human mediated introduction and/or recent natural colonization cannot be entirely ruled out, we are of the opinion that our observation lends further support to the notion that the fauna present on the satellite islands north-west of Trini-

dad is largely relict of the Pleistocene and the product of vicariance (Boos 1984); representing populations that became isolated after sea levels rose at the end of the last ice age and drowned low lying areas, leaving the higher areas as the satellite islands as they now exist with their faunal populations separated from those on Trinidad and mainland South America.

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