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Notes on the Snake *Erythrolamprus ocellatus* in Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago

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NATURE NOTE

Notes on the Snake *Erythrolamprus ocellatus* in Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago

Erythrolamprus ocellatus (Peters 1868) is an uncommon snake endemic to Tobago (see front cover). On 28 July, 2010, a specimen was collected by author (PC) at about 0700 h on the Des Vignes Road, Runnemede, close to the landmark silk cotton tree. This is the first specimen collected from the area, and the most western record for this species. The specimen's snout to vent length measured 453 mm, its tail 82 mm, and it weighed 38 g. There were 176 ventral scales and 44 paired subcaudals.

Emsley (1966) described this snake as "eager to bite" and "potentially dangerous". Our specimen however, never attempted to bite despite being extensively handled. Dave Hardy and Matt Kelly (personal communication) have confirmed that they have handled several specimens of this species and have never been bitten. The snake flattened its neck when disturbed, and upon attempting to handle it, swiped its head from side to side. This behaviour is similar to that of the common coral snake *Micrurus circinalis* in Trinidad. We spoke to several Tobagonians, most of whom used the name "coral snake" to refer to the harmless *Erythrolamprus ocellatus*. The lack of any banding pattern in the latter species easily distinguishes it from the former.

The captive specimen consumed two snakes (one *Tantilla melanocephala* and one *Attractus trilineatus*) and a worm lizard (*Amphisbaena fuliginosa*). A *fuliginosa* (not recorded on Tobago) is a new captive prey item for *E. ocellatus*. It attempted unsuccessfully to subdue

two other snakes; *Sibon nebulata nebulata* and *Leptodeira annulata ashmeadi*. Julius Boos got one specimen to eat the lizard *Gymnophthalmus underwoodi* in captivity (Boos 2001), but our specimen refused several which were available. It was most active in the morning from 0630-0745 h and again at 1730-1815 h.

The specimen is lodged at the Zoology Museum of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad as accession UWITT.2010.27.1, and is probably the only museum specimen of this species in the Caribbean region.

REFERENCES

- Boos, H. E. A.** 2001. The Snakes of Trinidad and Tobago. College Station, Texas: Texas A & M University Press. 270 p.
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