

Chironius carinatus (Machete Savane)

Family: Colubridae (Typical Snakes)

Order: Squamata (Lizards and Snakes)

Class: Reptilia (Reptiles)



Fig. 1. Machete savane, *Chironius carinatus*.

[http://animaldiversity.org/collections/contributors/jairo_maldonado/Chironius_carinatus/, downloaded 28 October 2016]

TRAITS. The machete savane is a slender snake that varies in colour from dark olive green to black. It possesses a sharply ridged back, with a lighter stripe along the middorsal region that contrasts with the darker colouring on the upper side of its body (Fig. 1). The chin and underside of the fore body is coloured a bright yellow, and along the first row of dorsal scales there are yellow spots on the body and tail. The machete savane has a total of 12 dorsal scale rows; the ventral scales number 146-161 in males and 150-167 in females. The subcaudal scales (below the tail) are paired; these number 108-145 in males and 108-133 in females. The head of this snake is large and distinct from the slim neck, and the eyes are large. The tail of the snake is very long and thin. Hatchlings are about 46cm long, and adults can grow to 2.8m (Boos, 2001).

DISTRIBUTION. *Chironius carinatus* is a widespread species, which ranges from Costa Rica to Ecuador and Amazonian Brazil, and Trinidad. Locations in Trinidad include the Caroni River, the botanical gardens in Port-of-Spain, Tacarigua, both the Northern and Southern ranges and the Arima Valley (Murphy, 1997).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY. This species is often found in trees and shrubs, but also readily takes to the water in the event it needs to escape predation (Boos, 2001). It is described as terrestrial and arboreal as it is usually found in trees. It is also described as a forest-edge snake due to its choice of habitat (Murphy, 1997).

REPRODUCTION. *Chironius carinatus* it is oviparous, which means it is an egg-laying snake. It lays small clutches of eggs, from 5-8 eggs in the late spring season. Hatchlings are usually a lighter green and get darker as they mature (Mehrtens, 1987).

BEHAVIOUR. The machete savane is an active hunter and preys on frogs, lizards, mice and birds. Although it is a terrestrial snake, it can take to water to escape predation. When threatened, it may open its mouth and inflate its neck to appear larger and will deliver bites, which are unpleasant although not dangerous (Boos, 2001). They have also been observed hanging by the tail from branches, and kinking the body to make it difficult to distinguish from leaf litter on the forest floor (Murphy, 1997).

APPLIED BIOLOGY. This species may have previously been very common, however it is speculated that after the introduction of the mongoose, the population has been diminished. It is subjected to parasitism from ectoparasites and endoparasites; chiggers and parasitic ticks, *Haemogregarina*, and lung parasites have all been found on different specimens.

REFERENCES

- Boos, H. E. A. (2001). The snakes of Trinidad and Tobago. Texas A&M University Press.
Mehrtens, J. M. (1987). Living snakes of the world in color. Sterling Publishing Co., Inc.
Murphy, J. C. (1997). Amphibians and reptiles of Trinidad and Tobago. Krieger Publishing Company.

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