

Clelia clelia (Black Cribo)

Family: Dipsadidae (Rear-fanged Snakes)

Order: Squamata (Lizards and Snakes)

Class: Reptilia (Reptiles)



Fig. 1. Black cribo, *Clelia Clelia*.

[<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mussurana#/media/File:Mussurana2.jpg>, downloaded 31 March 2015]

TRAITS. *Clelia clelia* is a neotropical snake which is blue-black with an off-white under belly (Fig. 1). The maximum length is about 228cm snout-vent length (SVL), with the tail another 24% of SVL. The rostral scale visible from overhead. There are 218-225 ventral scales, one single anal scale, and 19 dorsal scale rows at the mid-body. Juveniles have a bright red dorsum (back) with a black crown with an off-white collar (Fig. 2), and are about 23cm when hatched (Murphy, 1997; Herptofauna of Trinidad and Tobago, 2015). *Clelia clelia* is an opisthoglyph meaning it is rear fanged, it has large grooved teeth at the rear of the upper jaw that deliver a mild venom to disable its prey. It is not dangerously venomous to humans.

DISTRIBUTION. The black cribo is present throughout Trinidad (Boos, 2001), but not Tobago (Fig. 3). However, sightings of adults are limited, and those of juveniles are even rarer (Ali, 2015). *Clelia clelia* is also widespread from Mexico to Uruguay and Argentina (Fig. 4) (Murphy, 1997).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. The black cribo is primarily terrestrial, in heavily forested areas. They rely on camouflage to be undetected, and prefer to forage through underbrush and leaf litter. Since the black cribo have no heat sensing pits they use their tongue to taste the air for scent molecules from prey. The black cribo are primarily nocturnal and become active upon dusk (Boos, 2001). The juvenile *Clelia clelia* is a very secretive snake. It can often be mistaken for another snake, the ratonel *Pseudoboa newwiedii*, which is far more common than *Clelia clelia*.

FOOD AND FEEDING. The black cribo is carnivorous, and generally crepuscular and nocturnal. They hunt and forage throughout the year in the tropical forest habit. The black cribo is ophiophagous, and feeds primarily on other snakes. The most common prey is *Bothrops atrox*, (mapepire balsain or fer-de-lance) (Fig. 5), which is very common in Trinidad and can produce a clutch of up to 58 babies (Ali, 2015). The black cribo secures its prey by biting and holding, and may start feeding while the prey is still alive (Delia, 2009).

REPRODUCTION. *Clelia clelia* are oviparous meaning that they are egg laying. They lay a clutch of about 11 eggs in early March and they are hatched in approximately 3-4 months. The juveniles are brightly coloured orange-red (Fig. 2) (Boos, 2001).

POPULATION ECOLOGY. The black cribo is solitary and resides in heavy forested evergreen areas, where it is seldom seen. Being a secretive snake is very difficult to give a comprehensive account of the population size. The limited sightings were: one at Moora Trace Matura, 1988; one at Oil Field Road Goudron Guayaguayare, 1992; two at Trinity Hills Guayaguayare, 2008; a pair at Brasso Seco Trace Paria, 2013; one dead on road at Plum Road Brigand Hill, 2013; one at Moruga North (interview with a hunter), 2014; one juvenile at Cumaca Forest Platanal, 2015 (Ali, 2015); one on Chacachacare Island, 1996; one with a clutch of eggs documented by Boos (2001). This accounts for 10 specimen sighted and recorded within a span of 27 years.

APPLIED ECOLOGY. Little is known about the venom, but it is not potentially dangerous to humans. The black cribo is often referred to as “hunter’s friend” because of the primary diet of the venomous *Bothrops atrox*, the bite of which can be fatal to humans. The IUCN gives no information on the status of this species.

REFERENCES

- Ali, Saiyaad (2015). Interview by Nalini L. Rampersad on black cribo and *Bothrops atrox*, 27 March 2015, San Juan, Trinidad.
- Boos, Hans A.E. (2001). Snakes of Trinidad and Tobago. Texas: A&M University Press.
- Delia, Jesse (2009). Another crotaline prey item of the Neotropical snake *Clelia clelia* Accessed 2015.
- Kenny, J. (2008). The Biological Diversity of Trinidad And Tobago A Naturalist Notes. Prospect Press.
- Murphy, J.C. (1997). Amphibians and Reptiles of Trinidad and Tobago. Malabar Florida: Krieger Publishing Company
- Heptofauna of Trinidad and Tobago.* (2015). Black Cribo or Massurana. <http://www.trinidad-tobagoherps.org/Cleliaclelia.html>, downloaded 02 April 2015.
- Wikipedia. (2015). Mussurana. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mussurana>, downloaded 31 March 2015.

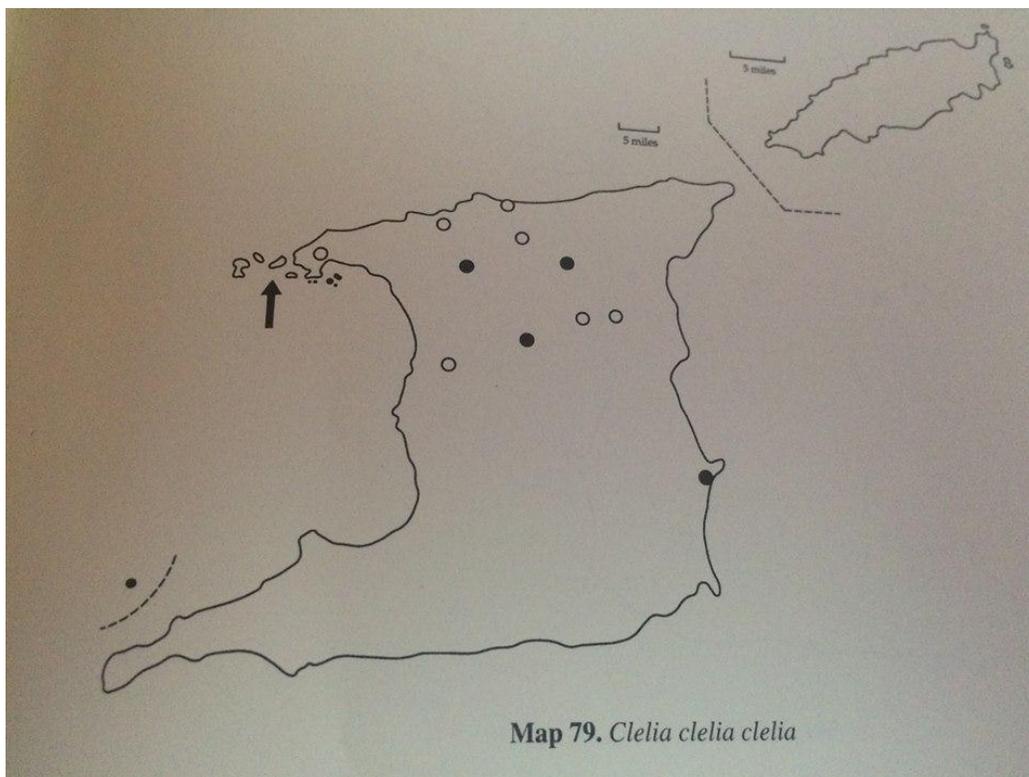
Author: Nalini Leenoi Rampersad

Posted online: 2015



Fig. 2. Juvenile *Clelia clelia*.

[<http://www.natgeocreative.com/photography/1157539>, downloaded 15 May 2015]



Map 79. *Clelia clelia clelia*

Fig. 3. Distribution of *Clelia clelia* in Trinidad.

[From Murphy (1997)]



Fig. 4. The distribution of *Clelia clelia* in the Region

[<http://reptile-database.reptarium.cz/species?genus=Clelia&species=clelia>, downloaded 2 March 2015]



Fig. 5. *Clelia clelia* feeding on *Bothrops atrox* in Brasso Seco, Trinidad.

[Original photo by Saiyaad Ali, Serpentarium (2012)]

For educational use only - copyright of images remains with original source