

Drymarchon corais (Yellow-tailed Cribo or Indigo Snake)

Family: Colubridae (Typical Snakes)

Order: Squamata (Lizards and Snakes)

Class: Reptilia (Reptiles)



Fig. 1. Yellow-tailed cribo, *Drymarchon corais*.

[<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/93731235965331666/>, downloaded 8 March 2017]

TRAITS. *Drymarchon corais* is a large, non-venomous, heavily bodied but still swiftly moving snake which is distinguished from similar species by the gradual transition in colour of its scales from black to yellow or orange on the tail end of its body (Fig. 1). The underside of the body is also similarly coloured as the tail. The species grows to 3m in length (Boos, 2001), and there are 17 scale rows at mid-body (Hyslop, 2007). Throughout its range there are several colour variations, and juveniles are typically paler than adults, with a light dirty white or yellow tail region (Boos, 2001). The name *Drymarchon corais* is now restricted to the western indigo snake of Central and South America, previously the subspecies *Drymarchon corais corais*. The eastern indigo snake of the USA, formerly the subspecies *Drymarchon corais couperi*, is now regarded as a separate species (*D. couperi*). *Drymarchon corais* does not typically display sexual dimorphism (Prudente et al., 2014), unlike *D. couperi* in which the males are larger than females and have keeled dorsal scales (McCranie, 1980; Layne and Steiner, 1984).

DISTRIBUTION. *D. corais* is distributed from Central America to parts of South America such as Brazil, Venezuela and Argentina (Fig. 2). It is also found in Caribbean countries such as Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago (Prudente et al., 2014).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. Typically found in forested areas, this snake is diurnal, semi-arboreal, fast moving and aggressive, with reports of them chasing humans (Boos, 2001). It is

known to forage both on the ground as well as climbing in vegetation, both in forested and open areas. It feeds on a range of species and appears to have a generalist diet, with commonly known prey species such as frogs, lizards, birds, mammals and other snakes (Prudente et al., 2014). It has been known to prey on the venomous snakes such as pit vipers like the bushmaster or mapepire zanana, *Lachesis muta*, the venom of which they appear to be immune to, as well as poisonous frogs such as *Bufo marinus* (*Rhinella marina*) (Boos, 2001).

FOOD AND FEEDING. The diet of the yellow-tailed cribo is considered to be generalist, with the main portion of the prey being anurans, followed by various species of lizards (Fig. 3), other snake species, bird and reptile eggs as well as birds and mammals. Both adults and juveniles tend to feed on similar species, with adults typically ingesting larger prey than juveniles. *D. corais* likely forages for nocturnal prey during the day when they are resting, both on the ground and in elevated vegetation, ingesting food head-first. Females decrease foraging during the breeding season, since it has been shown that there is a low amount of food items present in the stomachs of breeding females (Prudente et al., 2014).

POPULATION ECOLOGY. The yellow-tailed cribo is a solitary animal which can often be found sheltering in the underground burrows of other animals as well as naturally formed spaces (Boos, 2001). It is able to tolerate a broad range of habitat conditions, from mangrove swamps to drier sandhills, and is mainly terrestrial (McCranie, 1980), with adults usually having a very large home range which can be over 1000 hectares (Stevenson et al., 2009). Males engage in ritual combat for breeding rights, defending territory and establishing dominance (Prudente et al., 2014).

REPRODUCTION. There is little information available on the reproduction of wild individuals of *D. corais* due to its elusive nature. It is an oviparous (egg laying) species which appears to reproduce seasonally, with the most number of eggs being laid in the dry season, usually from May to August. This is possibly because after hatching, the juveniles have greater access to food during the rainy season. One clutch containing between 4 and 12 eggs is laid by each female in dens, in the months of May and June, which take approximately 3 months before hatching (Prudente et al., 2014).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. The yellow-tailed cribo, was once commonly encountered but is now a rarely seen species in Trinidad and Tobago. This decline is possibly due to predation by the mongoose (Boos, 2001). *Drymarchon couperi* is currently listed as being of Least Concern according to the IUCN red list (Hammerson, 2007), but *D. corais* has not been assessed.

REFERENCES

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Fig. 2. Yellow-tailed cribo geographic distribution, by country.

[<http://reptile-database.reptarium.cz/species?genus=Drymarchon&species=corais>, downloaded 8 March 2017]



Fig. 3. Yellow-tailed cribo swallowing an adult *Amphisbaena alba*.

[<http://www.ratsnakefoundation.org/index.php/article-base/asian-ratsnakes/22-members/other-colubrids/241-an-unusual-prey-item-for-the-yellow-tail-cribo-drymarchon-corais-boie-1827-in-the-brazilian-savannah>, downloaded 8 March 2017]

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