

Imantodes cenchoa (Blunthead Tree Snake)

Family: Dipsadidae (Rear-fanged Snakes)

Order: Squamata (Lizards and Snakes)

Class: Reptilia (Reptiles)



Fig. 1. Blunthead tree snake, *Imantodes cenchoa*.

[<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dejeuxx/5193767358/>, downloaded 28 September 2016]

TRAITS. Blunthead tree snakes are commonly about 0.8m long but may grow to 1.5m. They have big heads with comparatively slim necks and bodies, giving the other common name of fiddle-string snake. Their eyes are large, a quarter of the size of their heads, with vertical pupils (Fig. 1). The eyes stick out from their heads giving the blunthead tree snake the ability to look below. Colour is white on the belly and light brown dorsally, with darker brown patches along the body. Blunthead tree snakes have rear fangs, and large scales on their mid-dorsal area (Fig. 2) (Myers, 1982). Sexual dimorphism is seen: females have bigger heads than males, and males have longer tails (Link, 2013).

DISTRIBUTION. Blunthead tree snakes can be seen throughout most of Central America and the coastal regions of north-western South America (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, French Guiana, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Paraguay). They are also native to Trinidad and Tobago.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY. As an arboreal species, *Imantodes cenchoa* are found in trees. They occur predominantly in lowland rainforests and wet forests below 1500m above sea level (Link, 2013). Relying on their above average binocular vision and well adapted sensory systems, this carnivorous and nocturnal species feeds at night on small lizards, frogs and the eggs of both these prey (Fig. 3) (Zug et al., 1979; Gutierrez-C and Arredondo-S, 2005). During the day blunthead tree snakes are observed to be resting on tree leaves and tree bases in a coiled orientation. Not much is known about the population size of this species, however, their regional population density has been observed to be low (Link, 2013).

REPRODUCTION. Blunthead tree snakes normally show reproduction throughout the year. In regions with seasons of increased rainfall the rate of reproduction seems to be elevated during this season; for example, in Trinidad and Tobago, it is expected that there is an increase in the number of eggs laid and hatched during the rainy season (June to November) (Zug et al., 1979). Sexual maturity is reached at a length of about 60cm or an age of 2 years (Link, 2013). This species is oviparous, meaning that the female lays eggs which develop outside of the mother's body. Usually 2 or 3 eggs are laid, depending on the size of the female as well as its habitat (Zug et al., 1979).

BEHAVIOUR. Blunthead tree snakes have been observed to be a solitary species when not breeding. They are noted to be docile, however, not much is known about interactions between members of this species. While resting during the daytime, they are usually coiled in low vegetation where their coloration results in them being camouflaged (Link, 2013). This helps in averting predation. No specific information exists pertaining to predators of *Imantodes cenchoa*, however, it is assumed that the usual predators of snakes, such as birds of prey, fill this role. Some male versus male combat has been observed during reproduction. (Dos Santos-Costa and da Costa Prudente, 2005).

APPLIED BIOLOGY. This snake has very limited, if any, direct impact on humans. Despite being venomous, they are not harmful to humans (Zug et al., 1979). The overall deficit of information on this species, however, leaves room for further research. The blunthead tree snake is not known to be endangered by the IUCN or any other agency (IUCN, 2016).

REFERENCES

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- Zug, G., Hedges, S., and Sunkel, S. (1979). Variation in reproductive parameters of three neotropical snakes, *Coniophanes fissidens*, *Dipsas catesbyi*, and *Imantodes cenchoa*. *Smithsonian Contributions to Zoology*. **300**: 1-20.
- IUCN (2016). The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. <http://www.iucnredlist.org/search>.

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Fig. 2. Blunthead tree snake seen from above, clearly showing the relative size of its head as well as its protruding eyes.

[<http://www.wildherps.com/species/L.cenchoa.html>, downloaded 10 October 2016]



Fig. 3. Blunthead tree snake feeding at night.

[<http://www.wildherps.com/species/L.cenchocoma.html>, downloaded 10 October 2016]

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