

Ninia atrata (Coffee Snake)

Family: Dipsadidae (Rear-fanged Snakes)

Order: Squamata (Lizards and Snakes)

Class: Reptilia (Reptiles)



Fig. 1. Coffee snake, *Ninia atrata*.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ninia_atrata#/media/File:Ninia_atrata.jpg, downloaded 25 October 2016]

TRAITS. The coffee snake *Ninia atrata* is a small snake that can grow up to 49cm long. They typically have a band of coloured scales or collar around the head; these scales may be red-orange in colour, while the rest of the body is covered with blue-black scales (Fig. 1). In older adults, however, the collar may be faded or absent.

DISTRIBUTION. They are found in the South American region (Fig. 2), and are native to Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela, Panama, Ecuador and Colombia.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY. The coffee snake tends to inhabit rainforests, for example, the rainforests of the Amazon, Choco and the Caribbean, as well as in savannas of the Orinoco. Places such as gardens, crop plantations and hills may make a good habitat for *Ninia atrata*, which may climb in shrubs (Fig. 3). They tend to eat slugs and one of their predators is the coral snake. *Ninia atrata* are oviparous, meaning they lay eggs (Fig. 2). Female coffee snakes have the same characteristics no matter where they are native to, whereas the traits of males vary according to their geographical location (Angarita-Sierra, 2009).

BEHAVIOUR. The coffee snake is very active during the night time. When in rest, *Ninia atrata* form themselves into a spherical coil with their head at the centre. Antipredator behaviour displayed by *Ninia atrata* includes dorsoventral neck compression (flattening), crouching, body coiling and elevated body loops, or escape behaviour when a predator is present (Angarita-Sierra, 2015).

APPLIED BIOLOGY. *Ninia atrata* is Near Threatened on the IUCN red list (IUCN, 2016). Since the main habitat of the coffee snakes is forests, human interference such as deforestation can lead to the snake being deprived of a habitat. Forest conservation must be implemented in order to preserve this species.

REFERENCES

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Fig. 2. Coffee snake geographic distribution.

[<http://reptile-database.reptarium.cz/species?genus=Ninia&species=atrata>, downloaded 25 October, 2016]



Fig. 3. Coffee snake climbing on plant.

[http://www.firecrest-wildlife-photography.co.uk/Trinidad/Image-Pages/Red-naped_Coffee_Snake-PGL.html, downloaded 25 October, 2016]