Siphlophis compressus (Tropical Flat Snake)

Family: Dipsadidae (Rear-fanged Snakes)
Order: Squamata (Lizards and Snakes)
Class: Reptilia (Reptiles)

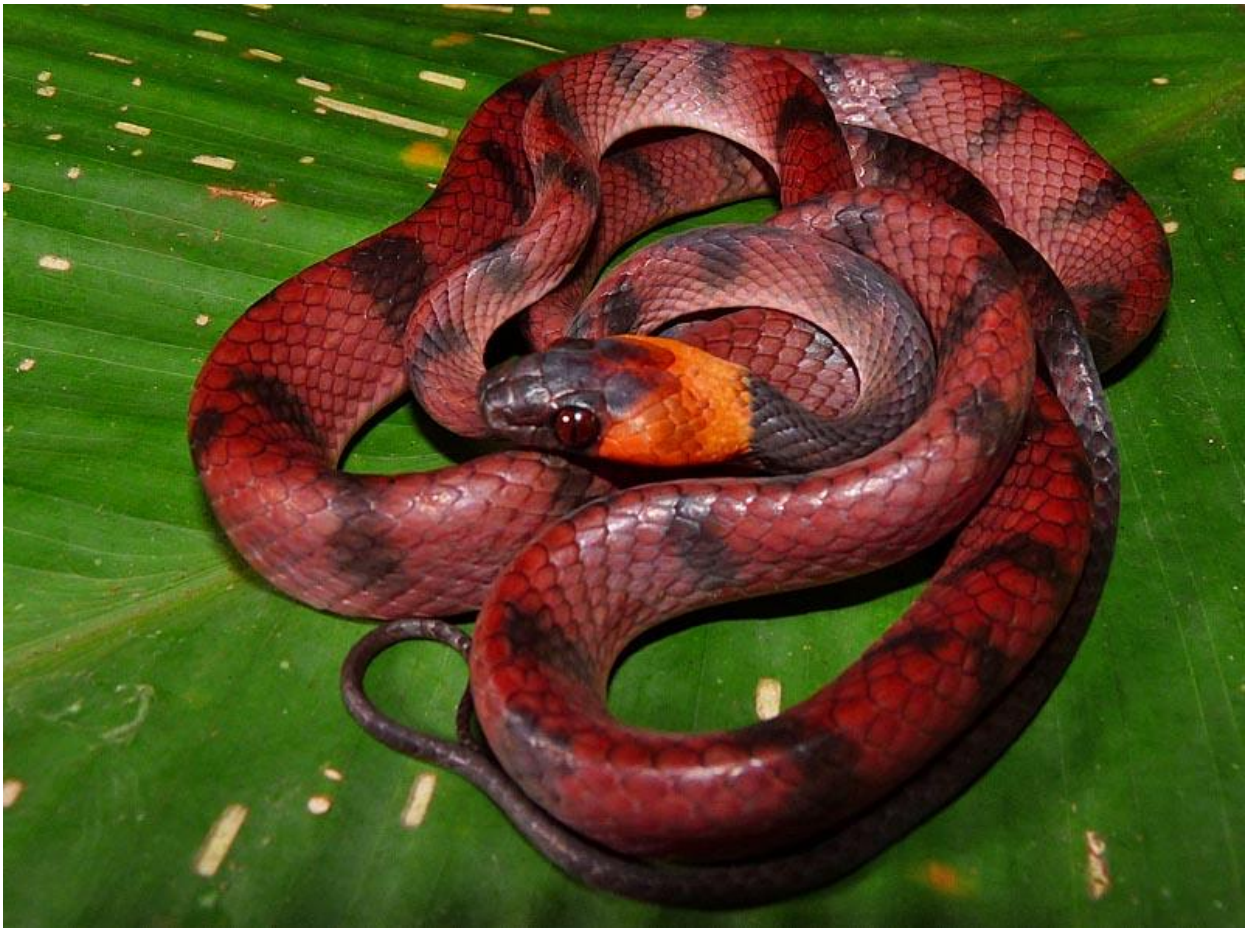

Fig. 1. Tropical flat snake, *Siphlophis compressus.*

[http://www.fieldherpforum.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=4369, downloaded 18 October 2016]

TRAITS. The Tropical flat snake *Siphlophis compressus* is a less well-known but common snake. It has several other names, including, mapepire de fe, red-eyed tree snake, and the banded tree snake (Wrobel, 2004), and was previously known as *Tripanurgos compressus*. These snakes can range from a bright red to a muddy brown in colour, with roughly equidistant darkly coloured stripes along the main body (Fig. 1), and a pale underside. It has a distinct, large head with medium-sized red eyes and vertical pupils. There are two enlarged rear teeth and Duvernoy's glands that secrete mild non-lethal toxins (Solórzano, 2004). The body is laterally compressed, with a moderately long, dark tail. Adults normally grow to 0.65m, but can achieve a maximum length of 1.42m (University of Adelaide, 2016), with males typically growing larger than females (Guedes, 2011).

DISTRIBUTION. This snake is found in the neotropical region, up to at least 1200m above sea level (Fig. 2.). They can be found in the Central American countries of Costa Rica, and Panama, and in the South American countries of Venezuela, French Guiana, Suriname, Columbia, Ecuador, Peru and Brazil. They are also found on the island of Trinidad.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY. The tropical flat snake is semi-arboreal (Fig. 3), inhabiting humid, moist, undisturbed forests. They live high up in trees, or among thick bushes, and may occasionally be terrestrial, inhabiting dark, isolated caves (IUCN, 2011). They may descend to the forest floor in search for food, or feed on prey on trees. They are known to primarily feed on lizards, such as small iguanas, but may also consume other snakes, frogs, small mammals and the eggs of nesting birds and lizards (Guedes, 2011) (Fig. 4). They hunt at night when their prey is inactive, and constrict them before consuming them whole. The tropical flat snake is able to consume relatively large prey in comparison to its body size (Fig. 4).

BEHAVIOUR. Since the tropical flat snake is nocturnal, and semi-arboreal, very little information has been provided on their behaviour. When threatened, its first instinct may be to slither away quickly, or ascend trees. However, this non-venomous snake may bite and secrete toxins. These are not lethal to humans but can result in adverse effects including, localised pain, muscular numbness and swelling (Solórzano, 2004).

APPLIED BIOLOGY. The IUCN Red List places this snake under the Least Concern category due to its widespread distribution (IUCN, 2011). It may not be of great concern for suburban or populated areas since they are limited to moist, forested areas with little development, and relatively undisturbed by human activity. However, a likely threat may be habitat destruction through extensive deforestation.

REFERENCES

Guedes, T. B. (2011). New records and geographical distribution of the Tropical Banded Treesnake *Siphlophis compressus* (Dipsadidae) in Brazil.

IUCN. (2011). *Siphlophis compressus*. IUCN Red List. http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/177499/0

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University of Adelaide. (2016). Clinical Toxinology Resources. *Siphlophis compressus*.

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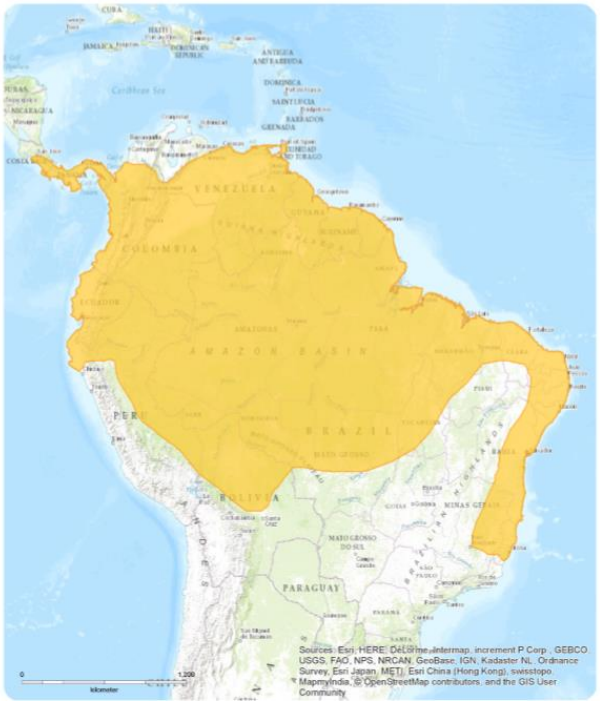

Fig. 2. Geographic distribution of the tropical flat snake (in yellow).

[http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/177499/0, downloaded 25 October 2016]

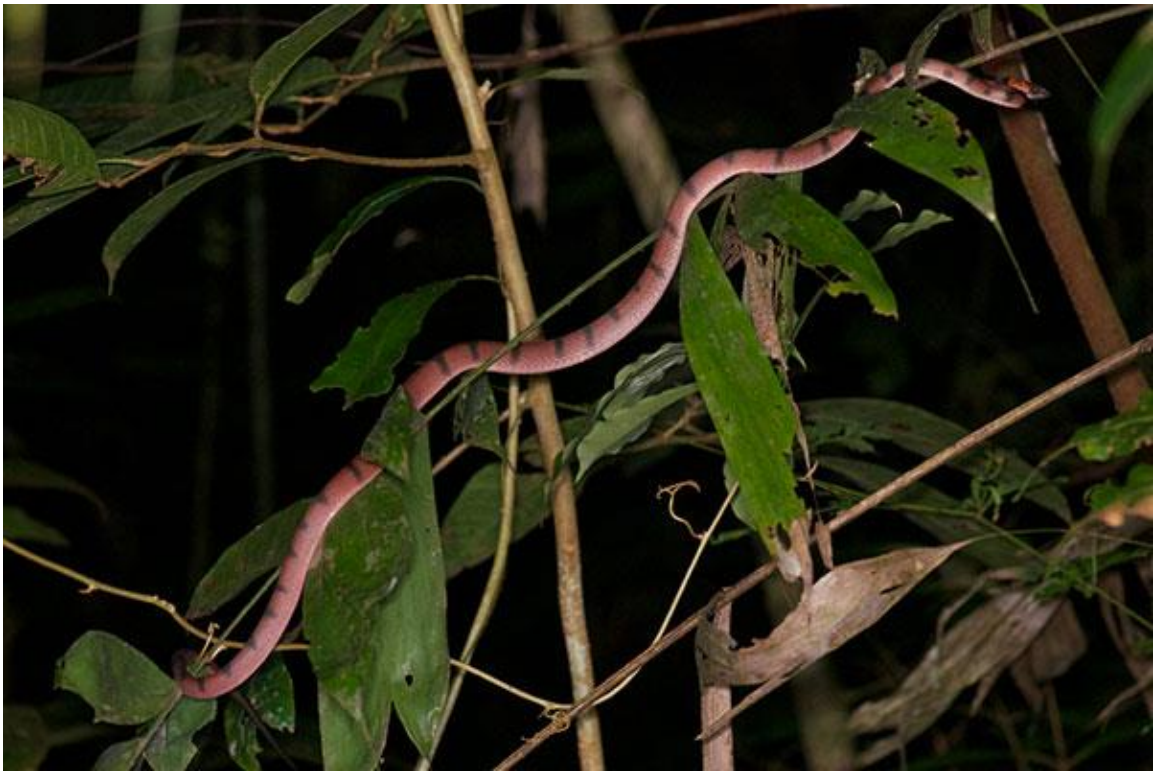

Fig. 3. Arboreal, nocturnal activity in a tropical flat snake.

[http://www.wildherps.com/species/S.compressus.html, downloaded 25 October 2016]

Fig. 4. Tropical flat snake feeding on iguana at night.

[http://www.herpetologynotes.seh-herpetology.org/Volume6_PDFs/Mollo_Herpetology_Notes_Volume6_page37-38.pdf, downloaded 25 October 2016]