

Spilotes pullatus (Tiger Rat Snake or Clibo)

Family: Colubridae (Typical Snakes)

Order: Squamata (Lizards and Snakes)

Class: Reptilia (Reptiles)



Fig. 1. Tiger rat snake, *Spilotes pullatus*.

[http://www.theonlinezoo.com/pages/tropical_rat_snake.html, downloaded 18 October 2016]

TRAITS. Amongst the largest snakes of the Americas, with a maximum length of 4.2m (Primareptilia, 2016). The usual maximum length is 3m in males and 2.5m in females. They are long and slender with a head that is distinct from the (Trinidad-Tobagoherps, 2016). The coloration of their scales is dependent upon where they are found. However, throughout their wide range the main colour for this species is black with yellowish markings as bands (Fig. 1), diagonals or even netlike patterns (Captivebredreptileforums, 2012). *Spilotes pullatus* is a non-venomous snake.

DISTRIBUTION. *Spilotes pullatus* can be found from southern Mexico and other countries south to Paraguay, including Trinidad and Tobago (Fig. 2).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY. Can be found in abundance in habitats close to water, mainly forested areas (Littlescorpion, 2016). They are diurnal semi-arboreal snakes, using both trees and

the ground, and can be found basking during the day on branches (Trinidad-Tobagoherps, 2016). They feed on a variety of rodents, bats, eggs and small birds, occasionally on amphibians and reptiles. Unlike other species of non-venomous snakes, their prey are not killed by being coiled around but by biting or holding and pressing against a solid surface or object. Depending on its environment, *Spilotes pullatus* may have a lifespan of up to 15 years (Pinesnakes.de, 2008).

REPRODUCTION. The ritual involved in courting is a crucial part in the life cycle of this species. During courtship males align their body alongside the female, sometimes on top of her, and begin violently shaking their tails over the female. They follow them wherever they go until the female bobs her head in acknowledgement as a signal of approval. The male continues to try until the female succumbs and mates with him. If another male engages in courting rituals with a female, the males show a combat ritual in which both males' bodies are entwined, each attempting to keep their heads upright and higher than the other (Herpetological Bulletin, 2013). About 8-14 eggs can be laid, and within 73-76 days the offspring emerge.

BEHAVIOUR. They are very territorial. However, if frightened they often descend to the ground. In the presence of a predator or threat they nod their heads and inflate their necks, increasing their size and intimidating their opponent, rattle their tails or flick their tongues. If the threat persists they bite, however, that is a last defence mechanism.

APPLIED BIOLOGY. This species is not listed by the IUCN. It is often kept as a pet in many homes. However, if the species is uncomfortable in the environment in which it is placed it often results in the owner being attacked or refusal to eat for a great period of time.

REFERENCES

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Fig. 2. Distribution of tiger rat snake or clibo, *Spilotes pullatus*.

[http://reptiledatabase.reptarium.cz/species?genus=Spilotes&species=pullatus&search_param=%28%28search%3D%27Spilotes+pullatus%27%29%29, downloaded 18 October 2016]

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