

Tantilla melanocephala (Black-headed Snake)

Family: Colubridae (Typical Snakes)

Order: Squamata (Lizards and Snakes)

Class: Reptilia (Reptiles)



Fig. 1. Black-headed snake, *Tantilla melanocephala*.

[<http://www.serpientesdevenezuela.net/web/index.php/familias/colubridae?id=124> downloaded 23 October 2016]

TRAITS. It is a small snake that can grow to 50cm, with 10cm of that being its tail. From a dorsal view the snake has yellowish or reddish-brown scales with a brown head and a darker pigmented ring behind the head (Fig. 1). Its neck is either yellow or cream coloured, and the underbelly is white and spotless (Rodriguez, 2016). It has no dark mid-dorsal stripe. The females are larger, with more ventral scales. They are nonpoisonous and harmless (Dos Santos-Costa, 2006).

DISTRIBUTION. This small snake can be found in Central and South America, from Guatemala and Panama to northern Argentina, and including both Trinidad and Tobago (Rodriguez, 2016).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY. These snakes usually live buried in the compost waste of primary and secondary forested areas (Rodriguez, 2016). They can also be found under stones or even in pastures (Savage, 2002). They feed on small arthropods such as spiders, scorpions, centipedes, insects etc.

REPRODUCTION. Reproduction occurs at the start to the middle of the rainy season. Males attain sexual maturity at about 10 months from birth, and the females approximately 20 months (Vasquez and Puerto, 1998). Larger females had more eggs (Dos Santos-Costa, 2006).

BEHAVIOUR. They are nocturnal and solitary. They spend most of their time buried in their habitats or under rocks and debris. Distinctive defensive behaviour was observed in a juvenile specimen of this snake, length 177mm, when handled. It raised the front third of its body in the palm of the hand, the head left still and not elevated, and it coiled its tail around a finger and began to energetically wave its body in an ‘S’ pattern (Fig. 2) for approximately 5 minutes (Sánchez-Guillén and Mendoza, 2014).

REFERENCES

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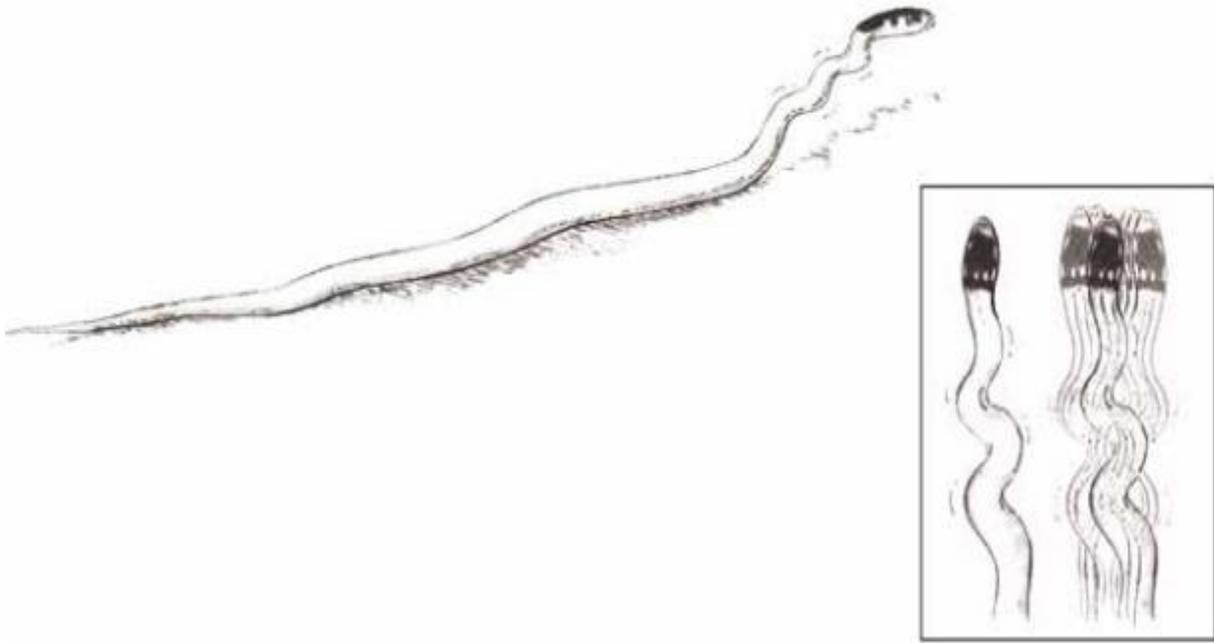


Fig. 2. Sketch of the behaviour exhibited by a juvenile black-headed snake.

[<http://erevistas.saber.ula.ve/index.php/herpetotropicos/article/viewFile/5251/5042> downloaded 24 October 2016]