Tupinambis teguixin (Golden Tegu or Matte)

Family Teiidae (Tegus and Whiptails)
Order: Squamata (Lizards and Snakes)
Class: Reptilia (Reptiles)

Fig.1. Matte, *Tupinambis teguixin.*

[http://pioneerunion.ca.schoolwebpages.com/education/components/scrapbook/default.php?sectiondetailid=3319&linkid=nav-menu-container-4-27882, downloaded 12 October 2011]

TRAITS. *Tupinambis teguixin* is the second largest lizard of the genus. They are also one of the most aggressive of the *Tupinambis* species, with lengths up to 3-4 ft at full growth. They have glossy scales, powerful limbs and long claws. They have black and gold stripes along the lengths of their bodies (Fig. 1), a cylindrically shaped body and a triangular head. Their tails are rounded proximally and compressed distally and are longer than the body. Their tail vertebras have fracture planes which allow the tail to be easily broken. They live for 10 to 20 years. They are actively foraging, egg laying, and terrestrial lizards. Hatchlings have a greenish/olive-brown coloration in between black bands that soon fades as they shed and full adult colours are present by 4 weeks. Shedding takes about 19 days. They are dimorphic, males have a wider head than

females and juvenile and adult males appear to have jowls and spurs at the end of their tails, with 12 femoral and pre-anal pores per side. They have good visual and olfactory systems, well formed eyes, eyelids, and long fork tongues (Murphy, 1997, Sewlal and Quesnel, 2006).

ECOLOGY. Has an Amazonian distribution but located in Trinidad and in many different areas such as Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, Panama, Brazil, Peru and now, due to owners that buy them as pets an release them in the wild, or they escape they are found in south Florida. They are found in habitats such as savannah, secondary forests, forest edges, primary forest, coastal areas, and stream margins. They are found to live in burrows excavated themselves or by others (Sewlal and Quesnel, 2006). They forage actively and are diurnal. They are omnivorous, feeding on what is available such as snails, insects, small mammals, smaller lizards, various fruits, honey, small snakes, and nesting eggs of birds, turtles and caiman.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION. They are solitary, alert, agile and territorial lizards. In some instances they are seen foraging in pairs, but are usually solitary unless mating.

ACTIVITY. They are diurnal. They bask in the direct sunlight, since they need to regulate their body temperature with their surroundings at the beginning of the day, when it is around 37- 40^0C (King et al., 1994). Once optimal temperature is achieved, they start foraging or mate-seeking within their home range, for the rest of the day, maintaining their body temperature by going from shade to sun. Also they sometimes hibernate for up to 5 months, and hibernation usually triggers breeding behaviours and copulation occurs about 1-2 months after hibernation.

FORAGING BEHAVIOUR. When searching for food, if animal feaces is seen the lizard takes a head start and dives into the faeces, rolling its body. *Tupinambis teguixin* is caught in Trinidad using an unorthodox method, due to its unusual behaviour of covering its body in animal faeces. The hunter would place animal faeces on an area near to the known borrowing area of the lizard, and wait for it to come towards the faeces. It would then run into the faeces sliding and covering itself as it goes. (Lennox Alexander, personal comm.). Not much is known about this behaviour and can be assumed that the lizard is searching for insects or is attracted by the smell. They use their forked tongues, flicking it while foraging for chemoreception. They also go through leaf litter or ground cover, digging it up in search of ants and termites. Their prey size correlates to their body size.

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR. Male home ranges may overlap, and there is competition for a mate. The male would follow a receptive female, guarding her from any other competing males. The male during courtship moves his legs as though marching in one spot for the female, then would prod the female with his snout and scratch her sides. Coitus soon follows, an in itself is a violent and aggressive event, with the male grasping the back of the females neck in his jaws before twisting his tail around hers. Mating season is in the May to June and she lays her eggs in August through Mid September. Males reach sexual maturity between 18 to 36 months. If the female doesn't hibernate she is capable of another brood during the year. Number of eggs is 20-50 eggs at one time, usually 30 (Robinson & Herrera, 2000).

JUVENILE BEHAVIOUR. Eggs take approximately 3 months to hatch. Young are born in burrows, most times without parental presence and emerge fending for themselves, or in other

cases in termite nests, where they were deposited as eggs. In the Amazon basin and other part of northern South America, the female climbs the trunk of a tree where termite nests are found. She then digs a cavity in the nests of the arboreal termites and deposits the eggs in their nests. The termites then repair their nests with the eggs inside it until it hatches. The eggs are then both protected from most predators but also the nest is warmer and more humid than the surrounding habitat and so the eggs develops faster. The eggs hatch during rains when the nest is softened by water absorption allowing hatchlings to emerge. The hatchlings would also have food supply when born. The hatchings remain in the trees for protection from many predators after they are born (Robinson & Herrera, 2000).

ANTIPREDATOR BEHAVIOUR. They are aggressive and whiptail and bite when cornered. Territorial, and if the males come into contact, they will fight till the death. The fracture planes allow for escape from predators by breaking of parts of the tail, distracting predators and giving the lizard time to escape. Young are prey to different birds, larger lizards, snakes and humans. The adult has large birds of prey as predators or large snakes.

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