THE SNAKES OF SURINAM, PART V: SUBFAMILY COLUBRINAE (GENERA *GEOPHIS*, *LEPTOPHIS*, *MASTIGODRYAS*, AND *SPILOTES*).

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Contents: The genus *Geophis* - The genus *Leptophis* - The genus *Mastigodryas* - The genus *Spilotes* - Postscript - References.

THE GENUS *GEOPHIS* WAGLER, 1830

34 Species of this genus occur in Middle America. Recently a new species is described from French Guyana (Trois-Sauts and Saut Pararé). It is possible that this species also occurs in Surinam.

Geophis alasukai Gasc & Rodrigues, 1979.

Maximum length: Approx. 55 cm.
Scalation: 151-154 ventrals; 36-38 subcaudals; anal shield entire; dorsals in 17 rows; 1 large loreal; 2 postoculars; 1+2 temporals; 8 upper labials; 7 lower labials.
Specific details: 26-32 light cross bands on the sides of the body.

THE GENUS *LEPTOPHIS* BELL, 1825

This genus contains 7 species of which 6 are found on the mainland of Middle and South America.
1 species, *Leptophis ahaetulla*, has 11 subspecies, of which only *Leptophis ahaetulla ahaetulla* can be found in Surinam.

General data of the genus:
Head: Rather oblong, having big eyes with round

pupils.
Body: The body is long and slender, has keeled scales, and is rather sideways flattened.
Tail: The tail is long and thin (whiptail).
Behaviour: It is an arboreal snake that hunts during the daytime.
Habitat: It lives in trees and bushy areas, as well as in and around towns.
Food: The snake eats frogs, lizards, young birds, and sometimes snakes.
Reproduction: The snakes are oviparous, the eggs are laid in a heap.
Specific details: This species is quite aggressive; at first it threatens with its mouth wide open, eventually it will bite. Because of its small teeth it makes only slight skin wounds.
The snake hunts in a special way. Whilst searching in the bushes the snake shakes its head vigorously. Frogs and lizards in the area are disturbed and try to escape. This is just what the snake wants, because it can only see moving targets and it will react instantly. The snake is so fast-moving that it is capable of catching a frog as it jumps. After swallowing the prey the snake will look for a high and dry spot to digest the food in peace. After four days the prey is digested.
The females of this species have scales which are more strongly keeled than in the males.
The eggs are laid in Bromelias or in holes in trees. In a terrarium the eggs are laid straight on the ground. The young, new-born, are about 24 cm long.

Leptophis ahaetulla ahaetulla (Linnaeus, 1758).

English name: Whip snake; Laura or Lora; Parrot snake.
Dutch name: Groene draadslang.



Fig. 1. *Leptophis ahaetulla ahaetulla*. Foto: A. Abuys.

Surinam name: Swipi.
Maximum length: Approx. 175 cm. In Venezuela a specimen was found which was 234 cm long.
Scalation: 153-173 ventrals; 150-172 paired subcaudals; anal scale divided; dorsals in 15 rows of keeled scales; no loreal shield; 1 preocular; 2 (sometimes 3) postoculars; 1+2 temporals; 8 or 9 upper labials; 5 or 6 (sometimes 7) lower labials.
Colouration: The upper parts of head and back are leaf-green; the sides are gold-yellow to brown-yellow, near the tail this colour gradually turns grey-brown. This snake has a black postocular stripe, extending forward across the snout, which divides the green from above with the white from the lower jaw and throat. On the front half of the body the belly is white and turns brown-grey towards the rear.



Fig. 2. *Mastigodryas boddaerti boddaeti* (juv.). Foto: A. Abuys.



Fig. 3. *Spilotes pullatus pullatus*. Foto: A. Abuys.

Distribution: The Guyanas and Brazil (mainly around the Atlantic coast areas).



Locality records from Surinam: 1. Surroundings of Paramaribo; 2. Nickerie; 3. Meursweg; 4. Bushcamp in Zanderij.

Specific details: In my terrarium (Zanderij, 1974) I kept two snakes 150 and 100 cm long. After putting a number of frogs (*Hyla leucophyllata*) into the terrarium during the day the snakes became active at once. During their search for the frogs they showed their typical head shaking technique. When a frog jumped out of the way, to my surprise both snakes attacked it ravenously at the same time, catching the frog in mid-air in the middle of its jump. I was even more surprised when I saw that the biggest snake was starting to swallow the smaller snake as well as the frog. The smallest snake had caught the frog just a little bit before the bigger one, but was caught by the head, together with the frog, and was swallowed by the bigger snake.

THE GENUS *MASTIGODRYAS* AMARAL, 1935

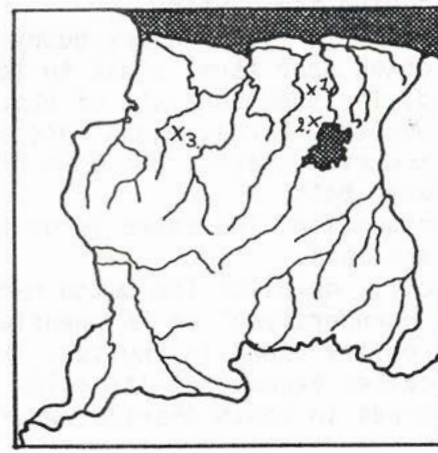
This genus contains a total of 11 species, of which one species does not occur on the mainland of Middle and South America. One species, *Mastigodryas boddaerti*, has three subspecies, of which only *Mastigodryas boddaerti boddaerti* can be

found in Surinam.

Genaral data of the genus:
Head: Typical colubrid shape, with big eyes and round pupils.
Body: Normal, the body has smooth scales.
Behaviour: It is a terrestrial snake that hunts during the daytime.
Habitat: Savannah and upland rain forests.
Food: It feeds on lizards, frogs, reptile eggs, young birds, little or young mammals, and sometimes insects such as large grasshoppers.
Reproduction: These snakes are oviparous.
Specific details: The only sign of aggression this snake shows is a rapid vibrating of its tail. It will only bite when actually held.

Mastigodryas boddaerti boddaerti (Sentzen, 1796).

English name: Machete couesse; Brown lined snake; Grass snake.
Surinam name: Alattaman sneki.
Maximum length: Approx. 150 cm.
Scalation: 178-199 ventrals; 94-124 paired subcaudals; anal scale divided; dorsals in 17 rows of smooth scales; 1 loreal shield; 1 preocular; 2 (sometimes 3) postoculars; 2 (sometimes 1) + 2 (sometimes 3) temporals; 9 (sometimes 10) supralabials; 10 or 11 (sometimes 9) sublabials.
Colouration: The snake is brown to brown-grey with a



thin light coloured line down the sides. The belly is white to grey white.
Distribution: Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, the Guyanas, Brazil and Bolivia.
Locality records from Surinam: 1. Bushcamp in Zanderij; 2. Brownsberg; 3. Amskreek.
Specific details: In a terrarium the snake can be fed with mice.

THE GENUS *SPILOTES* WAGLER, 1830

This genus contains 1 species with 5 subspecies, of which only the subspecies *Spilotes pullatus pullatus* occurs in Surinam.

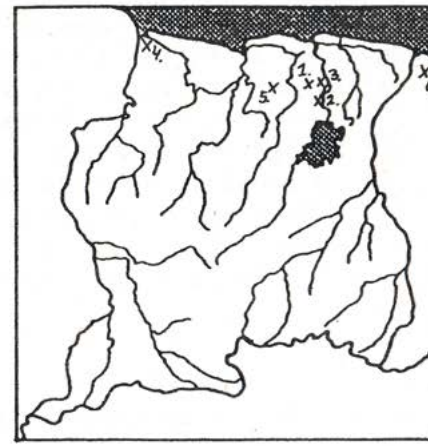
General data of the genus:
Head: The head merges gradually into the body. The snake has big eyes with round pupils.
Body: This is a missive snake, and the sides are rather flattened. It has an even number of rows of dorsal scales just like the genus *Chironius*. This is a unique feature because all other genera have got a vertebral row of dorsal scales.
Behaviour: It is an arboreal snake that hunts during the daytime.
Habitat: It lives in dry bushy and forest areas, often near farms close to towns.
Food: The food consists of chickens from domestic poultry, birds, eggs, rats and mice, lizards and even snakes, but also other small mammals, even bats.
Reproduction: The snake is oviparous, 8 to 18 eggs are laid.
Specific details: The Dutch name for this snake is "Hoenderslang" or "Kippenslang", which means Poultry snake in English. The snake is so called because of its raids on farms in certain areas in South America, where it takes young

chickens and other domestic poultry. When the animal is disturbed or in danger it raises up the front part of its body whilst vibrating its tail rapidly, and the throat is spread vertically. Seen from the front, this action seems to make the snake twice its size. Large prey is constricted, but small prey is swallowed alive. Small prey are probably killed by the chewing of the snake before reaching the throat.

Spilotes pullatus pullatus (Linnaeus, 1758).

English name: Tiger snake; Black and Yellow rat snake.
Dutch name: Hoenderslang; Kippenslang.
Surinam name: Sapakara-sneki.
Maximum length: Approx. 3 m.
Scalation: Males 107-228, females 215-241 ventrals; 102-129 paired subcaudals; anal scale entire; usually 18 rows of dorsals, of which the upper rows are keeled; 1 small loreal (sometimes not present); 1 preocular; 2 postoculars; 1+1 or 1+2 (sometimes 1+3) temporals; 7 or 8 (sometimes 6 or 9) supralabials, of which the 3rd and 4th or the 4th and 5th are in contact with the eye; 6 or 7 sublabials.
Colouration: Generally it is coloured black and yellow, in irregular oblique stripe-like spots. Outside Surinam specimens occur that are nearly all yellow. The belly is mainly yellow with wide blackish cross stripes, the underside of the tail is a purple colour, broken now and then by a yellow band. The upper part of the head is totally black or blue-black. The upper and lower labials are spotted yellow and black. Juveniles have a thin yellow neckstripe.
Distribution: Middle and South America as far as the northern part of Argentina.
Locality records from Surinam: 1. Bushcamp in Zan-

derij (along the rail-track in bare and dry areas); 2. along the Affobakkaweg near Kraka; 3. surroundings of Powakka; 4. surroundings of Nickerie; 5. 6 km beyond the Saramacca-bridge (in the direction of Bitagron; 6. Mana (French Guyana).



POSTSCRIPT

The information on the habitat of the different species is not complete. My information is more of a description of the locality records of only a few specimens. These animals are mostly seen and captured during their hunt for food, and have been spotted away from their natural place of rest.

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