THE SNAKES OF SURINAM, PART VIII: SUBFAMILY *XENODONTINAE* (GENERA *ERYTHROLAMPRUS*, *HELICOPS* AND *HYDRODYNASTES*).

By: A. Abuys, Jukwerderweg 31, 9901 GL Appingedam, The Netherlands.

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THE GENUS *ERYTHROLAMPRUS* WAGLER, 1830

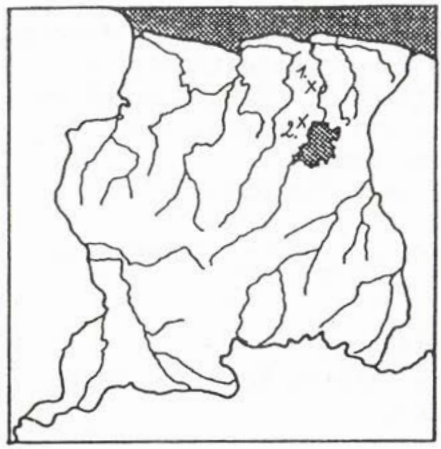
This genus includes 6 species, of which two have 5 and 3 subspecies. In Surinam only the subspecies *Erythrolamprus aesculapii aesculapii* occurs.

General data of the genus:
Head: The head gradually merges into the neck.
Body: Generally small snakes, cylindrical shaped with smooth scales.
Tail: Subcaudals in pairs. The anal scale is divided.
Behaviour: This snake is a night hunter and subterrestrial.
Habitat: This snake lives on the bottom of forests, savannah-forests and forest situations. It lives in the same habitat as *Micrurus*-species.
Food: It preys on worms, small snakes, insects (crickets) lizards and frogs.
Reproduction: The snake is oviparous.

Erythrolamprus aesculapii aesculapii (Linnaeus, 1766)

Dutch name: Valse koraalslang.
English name: False Coral snake, Necklace snake.
Surinam name: Krara sneki.

Maximum length: About 80 cm.
Scalation: 7 supra labials (3rd and 4th entering the orbit); 9 sublabials; 1 loreal; 1 preocular; 2 postoculars; dorsals in 15 rows of smooth scales; 172 -194 ventrals; 35-49 subcaudals; anal scale divided; 1+2 or 1+1 temporals.
Specific details: This species looks a lot like the *Micrurus* species (Coral snakes), especially with bands around the body, a specific feature of the real Coral snake. *Erythrolamprus* however can be distinguished quite clearly from the venomous snakes by the arrangement of the bands. Like the photo shows *Erythrolamprus* has one white ring in the black band. This white ring becomes broader on the venter. But for one exception (for example a black band - with at both sides a small white ring as a limitation) the real Coral snakes in Surinam have a broad black band in which two white rings are situated. Also the snout can be a distinguishing mark. The snout of *Erythrolamprus* is light brown while most of the Surinam coral snakes have a black snout. An exception on this however is *Micrurus surinamensis*, whose head has red scales with a black lining forming a sort of net drawing.



Erythrolamprus aesculapii aesculapii has some enlarged back teeth (fangs) in the upper jaw which are grooved and connected with a poison gland. This snake thus belongs to the 'real' opisthoglyphs.



Fig. 1. *Erythrolamprus aesculapii aesculapii*. Foto: A. Abuys.

net drawing. *Erythrolamprus aesculapii aesculapii* has some enlarged back teeth (fangs) in the upper jaw which are grooved and connected with a poison gland. This snake thus belongs to the 'real' opisthoglyphs.

Distribution: The whole stream area of the Amazon and the Guyanas.

Locality records in Surinam: 1. Surroundings of Zanderij; 2. Browns Mountain.

THE GENUS *HELICOPS* WAGLER, 1830

This genus includes 13 species, of which one species has 2 subspecies. In Surinam 2 species occur: *Helicops angulatus* and *Helicops leopardinus*.

General data of the genus:

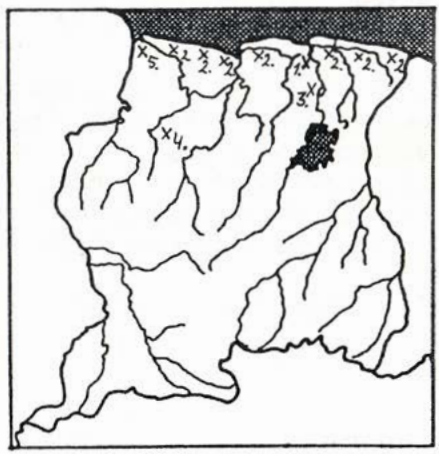
Head: The head is short gradually merging into the neck. The internasal scales are united, in consequence the snout is compact. The nostrils and

eyes are high on the head (a specific feature of *Helicops angulatus*) an adaption for living in water. The small eyes have round pupils.
Body: The body is stoutly built with keeled scales.
Tail: The tail is slender.
Behaviour: This genus is aquatic and probably hunts at night.
Habitat: This snake lives in swampy areas, and on the coast line, but can also be found in the higher inland along rivers and creeks.
Food: The food consists of fish and frogs.
Reproduction: This genus lays eggs.
Specific details: These snakes are agressive, often mistaken by their colouration and behaviour for poisonous snakes. In Brasil people fear these snakes, names like 'Cobras d'agua' or 'Surucucuranas' (Surucucu = *Lachesis muta*) make that clear. The teeth in the upper jaw are enlarged towards the back of the jaw. The back teeth, however, do not have a groove and have no connection with a poison gland. The saliva of these snakes, however, seems to be more or less toxic.
By biting heavily the snake injects some toxic saliva into the body of the prey, by which it is probably paralysed and becomes more manageable for the snake. At first these snakes will strangle their prey with a couple of windings. Emsley gives the following description of the behaviour of a couple of *Helicops angulatus*: "A Tilapia fish was clasped in a spiral winding and was held under water for 22 minutes. While killing its prey, its nostrils were closed under water".

Helicops angulatus (Linnaeus, 1758)

Dutch name: Gebandeerde schele waterslang
English name: Brown-banded Water snake, Water labarria.

Surinam name: Watra sneki.
Maximum length: About 1 metre.
Scalation: 8, sometimes 9 supralabials; 1 loreal; 1 preocular; 2 postoculars; dorsals in 19 rows of keeled scales; 107-122 ventrals; 61-104 subcaudals in pairs and keeled; anal scale divided; 1+2, sometimes 2+2 or 2+3 temporals.
Specific details: The head is flattened and compact built, the eyes are remarkably high on the head, are gold-edged and the round pupils are very mobile. The rostral scale is triangular. The basic colour of head and body, depending on age, varies from olive green to grey brown and from grey brown to black brown. The dark brown to brown black irregular broad bands narrow on the belly and turn into rectangular markings. Older specimens have such a dark basic colour that the bands may be obscure.
The colour of the belly varies from yellow to pink red, the shifting rectangular markings making a regular pattern. The posterior enlarged teeth of *Helicops angulatus* are separated from the others by an interspace. A remarkable feature are the keeled subcaudals.
Distribution: Trinidad, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, Colombia, Guyanas, and the Amazon basin. Locality records in Surinam: 1. Surroundings of Paramaribo; 2. along the whole East-West connection (many of the animals are run over on the road); 3. surroundings of Zanderij; 4. Amskreek; 5. Nickerie.



Remarks: A specimen of nearly one metre was picked out of a fish trap by Mr. J. Moonen. The snake had eaten a large fish and then could not get out of the cage. In Nickerie in 1974 I was given two specimens of about 70 cm which were caught in fish nets. One of the specimens had a yellow belly and the other a beautiful pink-red belly. The specimen with the pink-red belly had as a basic colour pink-brown and dark red-brown bands. Once taken out of the water these snakes became very aggressive. They stroke many times and the bite was very painful. One of the two bites I had was itching after a few minutes. I don't know if this was caused by the so called toxic saliva (Grzimek) or just coincidence. The size of the specimens collected by me were: 2x40 cm, 1x53 cm, 2x70 cm, 1x78 cm and 1x90 cm.

Helicops leopardinus (Schlegel, 1837)

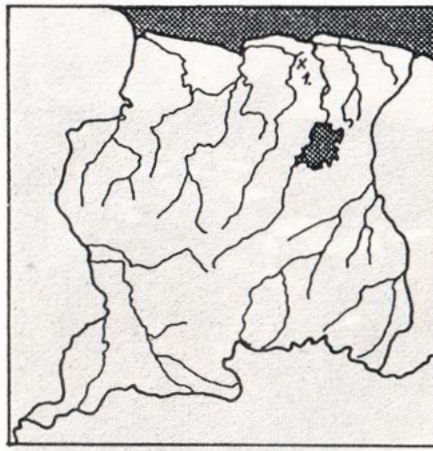
Dutch name: Gevlekte schele waterslang
Surinam name: Watra sneki.
Maximum length: About 90 cm.
Scalation: 7, sometimes 8 supralabials; 1 loreal; 1 preocular; 2 postoculars; dorsals in 19 rows of keeled scales; 119-126 ventrals; male 85-91, female 68-77 subcaudals; anal scale divided; 1+2, sometimes 2+2 or 1+3 temporals.
Specific details: The basic colour is olive green or grey brown with two rows of black spots. The colour of the belly varies from yellow to orange red with black square spots or bands. The subcaudals are not keeled. The posterior teeth of the upper jaw are not separated from the others.
Distribution: The Guyanas, Brasil and northern Argentina.
Locality records in Surinam: 1. Boma-polder.
Remarks: This snake is rare in Surinam. I did not come across this snake when I was in Surinam,



Fig. 2. *Helicops angulatus*. Foto: A. Abuys.



Fig. 3. *Helicops angulatus*. Foto: A. Abuys.



Helicops angulatus is more often found.

THE GENUS *HYDRODYNASTES* FITZINGER, 1834

This genus includes only one species with two subspecies. In Surinam only one subspecies occurs: *Hydrodynastes bicinctus bicinctus*.

General data of the genus:
Head: The head gradually merges into the neck and body of the snake. Because of a number of 'suboculars' the supralabials do not touch the eye. The eyes have round pupils.
Body: The body is stoutly built and the snake itself of medium build.
Tail: The tail is long with a single anal scale.
Behaviour: This snake is diurnal and aquatic. In case of danger the snake does not flee but broadens its neck in a cobra-like way and makes a loud hissing noise.
Habitat: Along rivers and streams in thick bushes and in the neighbourhood of swamps.
Food: Mainly fish, but will also take frogs, snakes, birds and small mammals.

Hydrodynastes bicinctus bicinctus (Herrmann, 1804)

Dutch name: Dubbel gebande waterslang



Fig. 4. *Hydrodynastes bicinctus*. Foto: J. de Bruin.

Surinam name: Anjoemara sneki.
Maximum length: About 2 metres.
Scalation: 8, sometimes 9 supralabials; 11 sublabials; 1 loreal; 1 preocular; 2 postoculars; 3 suboculars; dorsals in 19 rows of smooth scales; 166-172 ventrals; 60-79 subcaudals; a single anal scale; 1+2, sometimes 1+3 or 2+3 temporals.
Specific details: The body, especially in young animals, is regularly banded black and red that are separated from each other by a small yellow band. The black bands narrow on the belly and become irregular. The red bands turn into small irregular black cross bands on the belly and the small yellow bands turn white. As a result the belly is mainly white coloured with irregular black cross bands. The head is red coloured with small black spots.
Distribution: The Guyanas, the Amazon basin of Brasil, Colombia and Venezuela.

Locality records in Surinam: I have not yet seen this snake myself in Surinam.

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