

CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF THE OPHIDIANS OF FRENCH GUYANA

PRESENCE OF A NEW COLUBRID IN FRENCH GUYANA, *XENOPHOLIS SCALARIS* (WUCHENER, 1861)

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INTRODUCTION

Due to contact with the Amazon basin to the east, and the massif of Guyana to the west, French Guyana possesses an extremely rich herpetofauna. This privileged position allows an Amazonian influence, particularly on the eastern side of the region, specifically around Cayenne and the Kaw marshes. Progressing towards Surinam, these influences are theoretically attenuated. Because of its western situation, the region of Saint Laurent du Maroni should follow also this logic. With regard to the geographical distribution of the reptiles of Guyana, the discovery of one species, until now only found in the Amazon region, attenuates the biogeographical delimitations between the east and west side of the region (Lescure, 1986).

XENOPHOLIS SCALARIS (Wuchener, 1861)

A specimen was found on the 15th of December 1994, at about 22:30 hrs, to the west of Saint Laurent du Maroni. It was crossing the RN1 near PK44. The edges of the road were covered by secondary forest, which unfortunately doesn't give a clear indication of the species biotope. According to Cunha and Nascimento (1978), this terrestrial snake lives in the humid areas of primary forest, and in old secondary forest. This corresponds to where we captured the animal. Its food mainly consists of amphibians.

DESCRIPTION

The snake, a male, was small: 219 mm total length, with a tail of 39 mm. The snake is slender and in cross-section the body is triangular. The body was brown with a thin dark longitudinal line that starts at the beginning of the neck. Characteristically the beginning of this line is perpendicular to the neck. Alternating on either side of the line, dark triangles

point down towards the flanks. The venter of the animal was a very pale yellow. Its colour and small size slightly resemble *Atractus schach*, which is also present in the region.

Scalation pattern:

Head:

Rostral:	1	Internasal:	2
Prefrontal:	1	Frontal:	1
Supraocular:	2 (very small)	Parietal:	2
Nasal:	1	Loreal:	1
Preocular:	1	Temporal:	1 + 2
Upper labial:	7-8 (4-5)	Lower labial:	7-9 (4)
Meritorial:	2 pairs	Postocular:	2

Body:

Dorsal rows:	17 - 17 - 17	Sub-caudals:	39 (our specimen)
Ventrals:	121 (our specimen)	Anal:	undivided

DISCUSSION

This is the first actual description of *Xenopholis scalaris* in French Guyana although Mr. Chippaux predicted its potential presence in the region (Chippaux, 1987). Endemic in the Amazon basin, its distribution area is limited to the Bolivian, Peruvian and Colombian Amazon (South-Western part, Pacific side: Rumiayaco) (Pérez-Santos and Moreno, 1988), to the equatorial Amazon (Provinces of Napo and Pastaza) (Pérez-Santos and Moreno, 1990) and to the Brazilian Amazon (States of Amazonia, Mato Grosso and the Atlantic forest of Bahia) (Cunha and Nascimento, 1978). Its presence in French Guyana and more particularly on the west side, the region of the massif of Guyanas, considerably extends its distribution.

This finding allows the consideration of the presence of more species belonging to the Amazonian group on the west side of Guyana. Until now, its presence was not reported from Surinam (Abuys, 1986). Considering the distribution map, it is likely that its distribution extends towards this country and possibly also into the Venezuelan Amazon region. This snake remains discreet, which was also the case in Para (Cunha and Nascimento, 1978), and thus makes it difficult to find.

The collected animal has been deposited to the Muséum National d'Histoires Naturelles de Paris.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We particularly thank Mrs I. Inesch and J.C. De Massary of MNHNP for their precious help.

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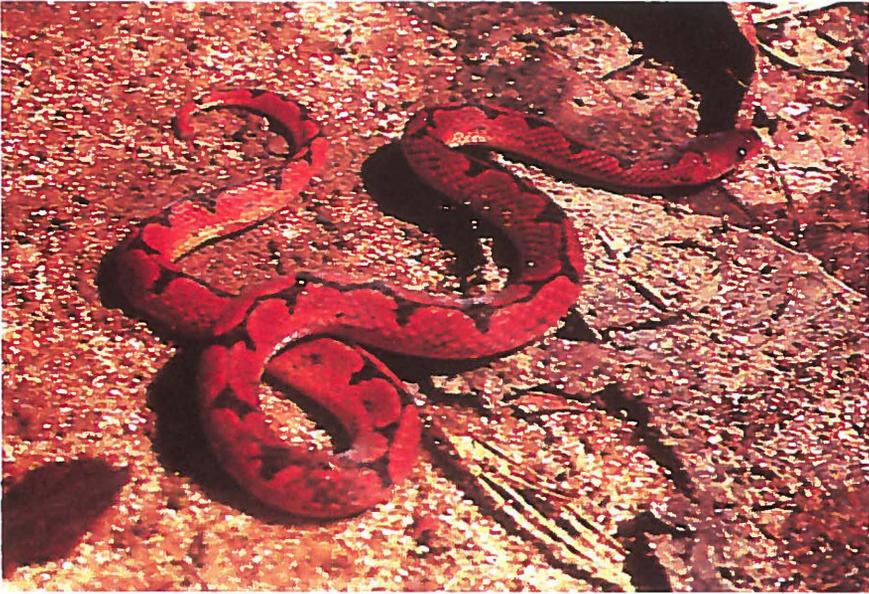


Foto 1: *Xenopholis scalaris* Foto: Fausto Starace



Foto 2: *Atractus schach*. Foto: Fausto Starace.

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