
AN UNKNOWN *ERYTHROLAMPRUS* FROM SURINAM

By A. Abuys, Jukwerderweg 31, 9901 GL Ap-pingedam. The Netherlands. 05960-25744.

Contents: Introduction - The genus *Erythrolamprus* - *Erythrolamprus* in Surinam - Scales - Unknown *Erythrolamprus* - Literature.

INTRODUCTION

During my herpetological safari in Surinam (1980) I had the opportunity of visiting the snake collection of the zoo dealer T. Henzen. There I found a snake with a colour pattern similar to that of a coral snake. Although the animal was for sale, I fortunately was able to take a photograph before it was transported to an unknown destination. Back in Holland, I showed the slide to Dr. M.S. Hoogmoed, who suggested that it was probably an *Erythrolamprus* species. As I studied this genus and its species as subspecies, I came to the same conclusion. Moreover I assume that the snake in question has not yet been described.

THE GENUS *ERYTHROLAMPRUS*

For orientation and comparison herewith some details on the genus and on the species which are known from Surinam: General data and characteristics of the genus *Erythrolamprus* (Wagler, 1830).

Head: The small head tapers almost unnoticeable into a firm neck. The eyes are small and have round pupils.

Body: The snakes are small, having a cylindrical body with smooth scales without apical pits.

Tail: The tail is short.

Biotope: The snake inhabits savanna woods and rain forests, which are at slightly higher altitude. It lives on the ground, generally near water. The fringe area between forest and the wet ricefields are also important hunting-grounds. In general this snake lives in the same biotope as the very venomous *Micrurus* (coral snake). Because they look very much alike, it is possible to regard this as mimicry.

Way of living: It is a semi-subterrestrial night hunter, which usually burrows in the earth in search of its prey. The genus probably also pursues its prey in water, as they also eat fish (*Synbranchus*).

Reproduction: The genus is oviparous.

Particular details: In general this genus does not seem to be aggressive, but individuals may suddenly feud. Most species of this genus look very similar to some species of the venomous genus *Micrurus*. A particular detail, which is specific for genuine coral snakes, is the complete set of rings in three different colours. The *Erythrolamprus* from Surinam is very easy to distinguish from *Micrurus* by the specific combination of its black and white rings. The *Erythrolamprus* mentioned above (and most other species) always have one white ring only in the black segment, so that this segment is divided in two equal parts. Most genuine coral snakes from Surinam have a broad black ring which is divided by two white rings into three parts (the so called triad). One of the *Micrurus* species differs slightly and has a broad black ring which is bounded on both sides by a very small white ring. In all cases, both of *Erythrolamprus* combinations are separated by red rings. However, the special detail by which *Erythrolamprus* species from Surinam are to

be recognized is a white small or broad ring which divides two broad black rings.

ERYTHROLAMPRUS IN SURINAM

The only species from Surinam which has been described until now is *Erythrolamprus aesculapii aesculapii* (Linnaeus, 1766).

English name: False coral snake, necklace snake.

Surinam name: Kraka-sneki.

Maximum length: about 1 meter.

Details: In general the rings of this species are not as equal as in coral snakes. The black rings are at their broadest at the vertebral scales, but become smaller towards the ventral scales.

As a result of this, the other rings (both white and red) differ in breadth just in the opposite way: at the vertebral scales a little smaller than at the ventral scales. This incongruence may however vary slightly in individual specimens. In the case of some snakes, the incongruence in breadth of rings is obvious, in others it is hardly noticeable. Also, the average breadth of each type of ring (red, black or white) may differ in each individual by between 0.5 to 1 scale length. One specimen from Bronsweg had somewhat regular rings.

A description of this specimen is as follows:

The black rings, which are arranged in pairs are 5 to 6.5 scales broad. The white ring between is only about 2.5 till 3 scales broad. The red rings are the broadest and vary between 7 and 8 scales. Most (not all) red scales of this specimen had a black spot on the top. The snout is of a medium brown, as the first white ring runs over the partial scales. The next black

ring of this specimen is not fully shaped and is only just visible as a black ring of about 1.5 scales in breadth. As a result of this, the first red ring is much broader than the rest.

A young specimen (juvenile; see photograph) from the surroundings of Bosbivak in Zanderij had no such regular rings: on the ventral line (mid-back line) the black rings are at their broadest, about 4 to 5 scales, but towards the ventral side they become smaller and are only 2.5 to 3 scales broad. The white rings have their smallest side on the vertebrae, being only 1 to 1.5 scales broad, as they become broader towards the ventrals where they measure 2 to 3 scales. In general, the red rings of this specimen are the broadest, but these rings also vary in size. On the vertebrae the rings measure about 5 scales (and are therefore just as broad as the black rings), but towards the ventrals they become broader (as the black rings become smaller) and measure only 6 to 7 scales. The snout of the particular young specimen is a little brighter in colour, being yellowish brown. The first light (partial) ring in this case is not white, but orange-yellow. Probably this ring will change gradually into white during aging.

SCALES (Lancini, 1979)

Pre ocular scale: 1; post ocular scales: 2;
Loreal scale: present; supra labial scales
7 (the 3rd and 4th touch the eye edge); sub
labial scales: 9; temporal scales: 1+2
dorsal scales: 15 rows around the middle of
the body (smooth scales without apical
points); ventral scales: 173 till 49 (in
two rows); anal scale: divided; maxillary



Foto 1: *Erythrolamprus aesculapii aesculapii*.
Foto W. Eriks.



Foto 2: *Erythrolamprus* species, Kwamalasamoetoe,
Suriname. Foto A. Abuys.

teeth: about 11 + 2 diastema + 2 (opisthognath, with 2 enlarged rearward placed teeth, provided with poison grooves and separated from the other teeth by space).

THE UNKNOWN *ERYTHROLAMPRUS*

As a comparison, herewith the data of the unknown snake:

Erythrolamprus species, English name:
Surinam false coral snake.

Length: about 60 cm.

Description: as all snakes of the genus, recognizable by two black rings divided by a white ring. A striking difference in *Erythrolamprus aesculapii aesculapii* is the size of both the white and red rings. The white rings of the unknown snake are very small, being only (and sometimes even less than) 0,5 scales. The red rings (in *Erythrolamprus aesculapii aesculapii* broader than all the other rings) are much smaller, even smaller than the black rings, and measure only 1 to 2,5 scales. The black rings of this species are the broadest and measure about 5 to 6,5 scales, which differs only slightly from *Erythrolamprus aesculapii aesculapii*.

Scales: data on scales is not available.

Place found: Kwamalasamoetoe, Surinam.

The next table shows some differences between *Erythrolamprus aesculapii aesculapii* and the unknown species:

E.a. Aesc. Erythrol.

snout end	brown	white
comb. black- white-black	12x	18x
breadth of white rings	2-3 scales	0,3-0,5 scales
breadth of black rings	4-6 scales	5,5-6,5 scales
breadth of red rings	6-8 scales	1,0-2,5 scales

As shows above, there is a large difference between *Erythrolamprus aesculapii aesculapii* and the unknown specimen from Kwamala-samoetoe. As far as I know this is almost certainly a new species.

LITERATURE

- Abuys, A. (1983). De slangen van Suriname, deel VIII: subfamilie *Xenodontinae* (genera *Erythrolamprus*, *Helicops* en *Hydrodynastes*.
Litteratura Serpantium: Vol. 3, no. 6, 227-229.
- Chippaux, J.Ph. (1986). Les Serpents de la Guyane française (Faune Tropicale XXVII).
- Cunha, O.R. da en Nascimento, F.P. (1978). Ofidios da amazônia: X-as cobras da região leste do Para.

Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi; Publicações Avulsas no. 31 (Belém-Pará-Brasil, 1978)

Editions de l'Orstom-Lancini, V., A.R. (1979). Serpientes de Venezuela.

Freiberg, M. (1982). Snakes of South America.

Grzimek, B. (1971). Het leven der dieren; deel VI, Reptielen.

Obst, F.J. (1984). Lexikon der Terraristik und Herpetologie.

Peters, J.A. en Orejas-Miranda, B. (1970). Catalogue of the Neotropical Squamata: Part I. Snakes. Smithsonian Inst. Press, Washington, Bull. 297.

Roze, J.A. (1966). La taxonomia y zoogeografía de los ofidios de Venezuela.