

## *Hydrops triangularis* (Water False Coral Snake)

Family: Dipsadidae (Rear-fanged Snakes)

Order: Squamata (Lizards and Snakes)

Class: Reptilia (Reptiles)



**Fig. 1.** Water false coral snake, *Hydrops triangularis*.

[<https://www.flickr.com/photos/55114263@N00/12917934215/>, downloaded 29 April 2016]

**TRAITS.** *Hydrops triangularis* is a medium-sized snake that can grow as long as 96cm, but most are smaller (TT Herps, 2016). It is called the water false coral snake as it has red and black rings around the body (Fig. 1), as mimicry of the true (and highly venomous) coral snakes, *Micrurus* (Elapidae). The most variable aspect of the colour pattern is the presence and distribution of dorsal red spots. The head is dark brown, with scales on the dorsal surface margined with black (De Albuquerque and De Lema, 2008).

**DISTRIBUTION.** This species is widespread in South America in the Amazonian-Guyana region, including Venezuela and Brazil. It is known for being widespread in Trinidad, but is unknown from Tobago (TT Herps, 2016).

**HABITAT AND ACTIVITY.** *H. triangularis* are snakes that are prevalent in streams, open forests and savannahs but more commonly in the shady, lentic (still-water) environments (De

Albuquerque and De Lema, 2008). Reports also suggest that slow rivers, swamps, flooded rice fields and ponds are also preferable areas of habitation that have been observed. It can be considered as one of the most aquatic snakes in the island of Trinidad, with the possible exceptions of the water mapepire and the anaconda. Their activity periods include evenings and nights (Fig. 2), when their prey items are more likely to be encountered.

**FOOD AND FEEDING.** *Hydrops triangularis* has a dietary preference for fresh water fish (De Albuquerque and De Lema, 2008), especially synbranchid eels (swamp eel) and other elongated freshwater fish (TT Herps, 2016). The video in Fig. 3 shows a water false coral snake ingesting a swamp eel at night.

**POPULATION ECOLOGY.** *Hydrops triangularis* is a solitary species. They can mostly be found in murky waters or waters that are not 100% visible. These snakes sometimes tend to inhabit swampy areas that are close to the roadside and as a result are road killed. When these snakes are ready to lay their eggs it is usually done by digging a shallow nest near the edge of a river bank. Once hatched, hatchlings are left to fend for themselves. Juveniles have been seen hunting on their own for several hours nightly. Sightings of *H. triangularis* have been made at the Manzanilla beach lagoon, Cumuto River and other eastern beaches of Trinidad. This species is widely confused with the aggressive *Helicops angulatus* commonly known as the water mapepire.

**REPRODUCTION.** Very little information has been published about reproduction in *Hydrops triangularis*. The typical clutch size from observed samples is usually about 15, ranging from 8-34 (TT Herps, 2016). Females have been normally reported with vitellogenic follicles in August and would give rise to offspring mainly around the November and December period (Dos Santos-Costa et al., 2015).

**BEHAVIOUR.** The red and black pattern of *H. triangularis* is a known defence mechanism called mimicry. The colour pattern on the body tends to confuse potential predators due to the fact that they mimic true coral snakes (*Micrurus*), which are highly poisonous. Unlike true corals these species are not venomous snakes (Herpetofauna, 2016). This species of snake however has been seen to have tendencies to regurgitate stomach contents when threatened or under extreme situations of stress (Dos Santos-Costa et al., 2015).

## References

- De Albuquerque, N. R, and De Lema, T. (2008). Taxonomic revision of the Neotropical water snake *Hydrops triangularis*. *Zootaxa* 1685.55-66.
- Dos Santos-Costa, M.C, Maschio, G.F and Da Costa Prudente, A.L. (2015). Natural history of snakes from Floresta Nacional de Caxiuanã. *Herpetology Notes*, 8: 69-98.
- Herpetofauna. (2016). *CORAL (FALSE & TRUE) OF BRAZIL*. <http://www.herpetofauna.com.br/Corais.htm> downloaded March 2, 2016.
- TT Herps. (2016). Water Coral, *Hydrops triangularis* (Family Dipsadidae). <http://trinidad-tobagoherps.org/Hydropstriangularis.htm> downloaded February 14, 2016.

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**Fig. 2.** Water false coral snake active at night.

[[https://www.academia.edu/8693874/Diversity\\_natural\\_history\\_and\\_geographic\\_distribution\\_of\\_snakes\\_in\\_the\\_Catinga\\_Northeastern\\_Brazil](https://www.academia.edu/8693874/Diversity_natural_history_and_geographic_distribution_of_snakes_in_the_Catinga_Northeastern_Brazil), downloaded 1 March 2016]



**Fig. 3.** Water false coral feeding at night (video).

[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2YOA8sCvIc>, downloaded 2 March 2016]

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