

Kentropyx striata (Swamp Whiptail)

Family: Teiidae (Tegus and Whiptails)

Order: Squamata (Lizards and Snakes)

Class: Reptilia (Reptiles)



Fig. 1. Swamp whiptail, *Kentropyx striata*.

[http://calphotos.berkeley.edu/cgi/img_query?enlarge=0000+0000+1012+1543, downloaded 18 October 2016]

TRAITS. The swamp whiptail is a small lizard, body length up to 127mm in males and 84mm in females, with the tail at least twice the body length. The colour is brown with about 36 light spots on the flanks, and green on the back, with a pale stripe running back from behind the eye (Fig. 1). The scales are small on the flanks, larger and in a regular pattern on the back (Fig. 2). The main character separating this from other lizards is the large, keeled (ridged) scales on the venter (belly). These help to hold the lizard against branches and leaves while climbing in vegetation. They also have fringes of rectangular-shaped lateral scales on their toes, to increase the surface area exposed to the substrate. These fringes have a tongue-in-groove type of connection between the scales, making them into flaps.

DISTRIBUTION. Restricted to South America, from Colombia to Brazil (Fig. 3) and the island of Trinidad (but not Tobago); a different species of *Kentropyx* is found on Barbados.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY. Swamp whiptails inhabit grasslands and Amazonian savannas (Fig. 4), where they migrate during the rainy season to occupy small vegetative islands until the water subsides. They are terrestrial and arboreal on low vegetation, particularly as juveniles. Although their distribution is not strictly riparian, individuals are often seen along streams, where they gain access to direct sunlight for thermoregulation. They acquire food from on trunks and branches and feed mostly on arthropods (insect larvae, termites and spiders) and

small frogs. They are diurnal in activity and typical of open areas. They move rapidly through vegetation when foraging, searching branches, small limbs, and upper and lower surfaces of leaves for food. They continuously forage, stopping only when body temperatures decrease below their preferred range as well as when they are copulating. It is presumed to be rare as it is not commonly seen.

REPRODUCTION. They are oviparous, laying their eggs underground in short and open grassy areas. Young are very rarely seen. Reproduction is seasonal, with reproductive activity concentrated between the months of July to November. Females lay 3-12 eggs with larger females laying larger clutches; they produce more than one clutch per season.

BEHAVIOUR. They are sun-seeking, active foragers especially from early to mid-morning. They are usually solitary, frequently seen running through grass or climbing in low vegetation to escape rising water levels. Their ability to climb and move about in vegetation is greatly enhanced by development of the fringe of scales on the toes, particularly for juveniles that move rapidly across leaf surfaces. Enhancing their climbing abilities are highly keeled ventral scales. They have excellent climbing abilities, usually scaling forest-edge trees, following this they lie on leafy vegetation or on branches enjoying the morning sun to obtain heat.

APPLIED BIOLOGY. This species is beneficial to humans as it consumes insect pests. This species is not listed by IUCN Red List.

REFERENCES

- Malhotra, A. and Thorpe, R. S. (1999). Reptiles and Amphibians of the Eastern Caribbean. London: MacMillan Education.
- Vitt, L. J. and Pianka, E. R. (1994). Lizard Ecology: Historical and Experimental Perspectives. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Vitt, L. J. and Pianka, E. R. (2003). Lizards: Windows to the Evolution of Diversity. London: University of California Press.

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Fig. 2. Size of scales on flank and back of adult male *K. striata*.

[<http://libraries.sta.uwi.edu.ezproxy.sastudents.uwi.tt:2048/resources/HarveyUguetoGutberlet2012Teiidae.pdf>, downloaded 20 October 2016]



Fig. 3. Swamp whiptail geographic distribution.

[<http://reptile-database.reptarium.cz/species?genus=Kentropyx&species=striata>, downloaded 20 October 2016]



Fig. 4. Swamp whiptail in Amazon savanna habitat.

[Fig. 14.10 of Vitt and Pianka (2003)]