

## *Plica caribena* (Caribbean Treerunner)

Family: Tropicuridae (Spiny-scaled Lizards)

Order: Squamata (Lizards and Snakes)

Class: Reptilia (Reptiles)



**Fig. 1.** Caribbean treerunner, *Plica caribena*.

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**TRAITS.** Named after its coastal distribution around the southern Caribbean, this lizard is brown-green in colour, with a few black markings across the eyebrow (supraciliary) and mouth (labial) regions, brown bands across the back and tail (Fig. 1), and mostly white with brown spots on ventral region. Snout to vent length ranges from 105-121mm in females, 81-121mm in males, with tail of 132-205mm in both male and female. Ridged dorsal scales with a spiny appearance, extending from head to tail; ventral scales are smoother and larger, laterally flattened tail. White throat and black gular pouch in males, grey throat and brown gular pouch in females; capable of changing colour (Murphy and Jowers, 2013).

**DISTRIBUTION.** These are found in coastal South America and the Caribbean, specifically Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago (Fig. 3) (Murphy and Jowers, 2013). *Plica caribena* is part of a species complex, once thought of as being a single species (*Plica plica*) but in recent years research has identified that there are five similar but separate species in the complex (Fig. 3) (Mongabay, 2014), one being *P. caribena*.

**HABITAT AND ECOLOGY.** Found mostly in the forest, it possesses diurnal (active during the day-time) and arboreal characteristics (tree-dwellers). Spends its time on tree trunks, rocks and infrastructure. Can be seen in small groups ranging from 6-15 individuals, both adults and juveniles. Head normally faces downward. They are insect predators using surprise attacks on their prey. Their preference in food includes a variety of insects; colonies of ants, bugs, spiders and more. This lizard is a prey to *Siphlophis compressus* (tropical flat snake) (Boos 1978). Reproduction is oviparous (eggs laid and hatched outside the body), and hatchlings are more terrestrial than adults (Murphy and Jowers, 2013).

**APPLIED BIOLOGY.** The treerunner consumes insects (Murphy and Jowers, 2013) therefore it is quite beneficial in eradicating pests and by and large useful to humans. This species is not listed in the IUCN Red List.

#### REFERENCES

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- Murphy, J.C. and Jowers, M.J. (2013). Treerunners, cryptic lizards of the *Plica plica* group (Squamata, Sauria, Tropiduridae) of northern South America. *ZooKeys*, **(355)**, 49-77.

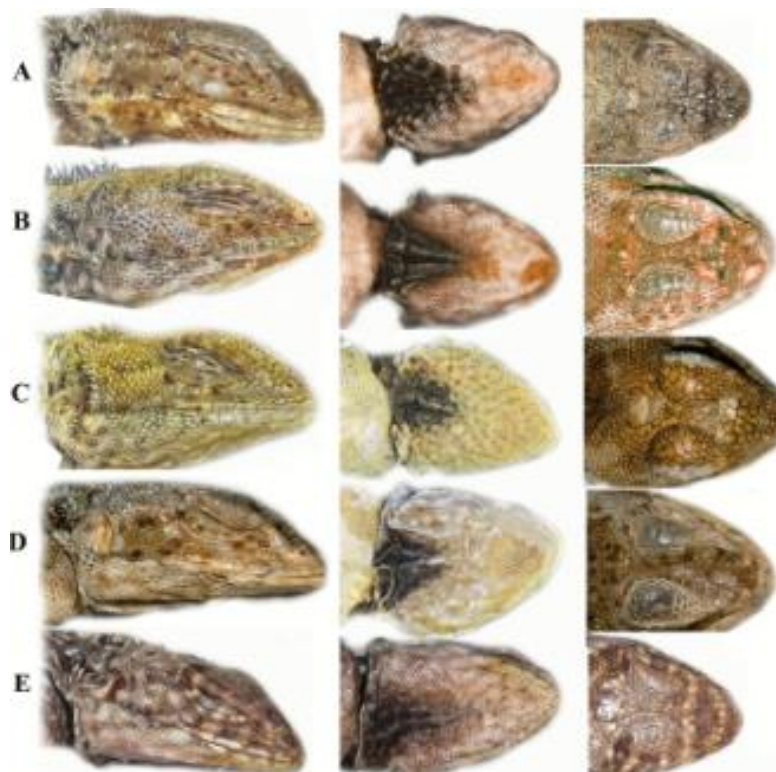
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**Fig. 2.** Distribution of *P. plica* group; *P. caribena* in white.

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**Fig. 3.** Head scalation comparison of five species in the *Plica plica* group found in northern South America. **A** *P. caribena* **B** *P. kathleenae* **C** *P. medemi* **D** *P. plica* **E** *P. rayi*.

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