

Ameiva ameiva (Zandolie or Jungle Runner)

Family: Teiidae (Tegus and Whiptails)

Order: Squamata (Lizards and Snakes)

Class: Reptilia (Reptiles)



Fig. 1. Zandolie, *Ameiva ameiva*.

[https://c2.staticflickr.com/4/3804/13311081294_c5a2cfcfc8_b.jpg, downloaded 29 March 2015]

TRAITS. *Ameiva ameiva* lizards are large bodied, streamlined in shape, their heads are pointed and their tongues are slightly forked. Their legs are short and their hind legs are very muscular (Fig. 1). These lizards display sexual dimorphism. The female body length is approximately 49cm and the male 56 cm (ttfnc.org, 2006). The males are larger than the females in size, their backs are dull green and their flanks are colourful, whereas the females are quite similar but they have much brighter green backs (Kenny, 2008). The males also have relatively larger heads than the females (Colli and Vitt, 1994). Juveniles have relatively large heads for their body size. *Ameiva ameiva* is also called the jungle runner or giant ameiva (Myfwc.com, 2015).

DISTRIBUTION. According to Animal Diversity Web (2014), *Ameiva ameiva* is found in Central and South America and in some parts of the Caribbean. Countries include; Brazil, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Colombia and many others.

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. They are diurnal, found in open tropical forests, woodlands and agricultural land (Anapsid.org, 1995), in open, sunny, grassy areas. Biazquez (1996) says that both adults and juveniles liked sunny areas and they spend most of their time foraging and basking. *Ameiva ameiva* are found in disturbed habitats but they preferably occupy disturbed areas where temperatures are generally higher than the undisturbed surrounding forest (Sciencedirect.com, 1999). It was expected that these lizards would be found in open habitats as they are ectotherms so they need to get their heat from the sun. In Brazil, it was found that the *Ameiva ameiva* are most active late in the morning and early in the afternoon. Juveniles were most frequently seen at midday whereas the adults were mostly seen during the morning and afternoon periods (Biazquez, 1996). Colli and Vitt (1994) state that their active body temperature is on average 37.9°C.

FOOD AND FEEDING. The zandolie is omnivorous and their diet is made up of a variety of vertebrates and invertebrates but they predominantly consume grasshoppers, roaches, beetles, spiders, and insect larvae. *Ameiva ameiva* also eat another lizard called the anole (Greene et al., 2005). The adults and juveniles are quite different in their maximum and average prey sizes but the adults still consume the small prey and this suggests the presence of competition between the two groups (Freire et al., 2011).

POPULATION ECOLOGY. The *Ameiva ameiva* is very common and is seen around on most days. These lizards are solitary, usually sighted alone. They can live approximately 4.6 years in the wild.

REPRODUCTION. These lizards are egg laying and females usually lay clutches of 1-11 eggs. However, it must be noted that the number of egg clutches and the egg sizes they produce are variable. One thing that can affect this is the female body size which is characterised by the snout–vent length (Colli and Vitt, 1994). Reproduction is seasonal, concentrated in the months of May–October (Colli et al., 1997). There is no parenting after the eggs hatch but the females supply their eggs with lots of nutrients.

BEHAVIOUR. *Ameiva*, like many other members of the Teiidae family, dig single-opening burrows where they go into and stay inactive (Pianka and Vitt, 2003, 196). Anapsid.org (1995) says that these lizards are active and they dig and burrow. Their streamline body and muscular hind legs can allow them to move very fast and this may allow them to easily evade predators. Burrowing can also help them evade predators such as birds. *Ameiva ameiva* have femoral glands, seen externally as a row of pores located on the underside of the hind legs. These glands are used for communication purposes such as sexual behaviour and/or territorial demarcation (Antoniuzzi et al., 2007).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. As of 1996, the IUCN lists the related species *Ameiva major* (found in Martinique) as extinct. No other *Ameiva* species were listed on the IUCN Red List. Giant ameivas are known to be carriers of *Salmonella*, including strains that are infectious to humans (Siders, 2014).

REFERENCES

- Anapsid.org. 1995. "Ameivas." Accessed 1 April, 2015. <http://www.anapsid.org/ameiva.html>
- Animal Diversity Web. 2014. "Ameiva ameiva Giant Ameiva, Amazon Racerunner." Accessed March 1, 2015. http://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Ameiva_ameiva/
- Antoniuzzi, Marta M., Beatriz A. Imparato, Miguel T. Rodrigues and Carlos Jared. 2007. "Morphology of the femoral glands in the lizard *Ameiva ameiva* (teiidae) and their possible role in semiochemical dispersion." *Journal of Morphology* 268(7): 636-648. doi: 10.1002/jmor.10473
- Biazquez, Carmen M., 1996. "Activity And Habitat Use In A Population Of Ameiva Ameiva In Southeastern Columbia." *Biotropica* 28(4): 714- 719. Accessed 05 April, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2389057>
- Colli, Guarino R. and Laurie J. Vitt. 1994. "Geographical ecology of a Neotropical lizard: *Ameiva ameiva* (Teiidae) in Brazil." *Canadian Journal of Zoology* 86(12): 1376-1388. doi: 10.1139/Z08-106
- Colli, Guarino R. 1991. 'Reproductive Ecology Of Ameiva Ameiva (Sauria, Teiidae) In The Cerrado Of Central Brazil'. *Copeia* 1991 (4): 1002. doi:10.2307/1446095.
- Colli, Guarino R., Ayrton K. Péres Jr. and Mariana G. Zatz. 1997. "Foraging Mode and Reproductive Seasonality in Tropical Lizards." *Journal of Herpetology* 31(4):490-499. Accessed April 1, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1565600>
- Freire, Eliza M.X., Raul F.D. Sales and Leonardo B. 2011. "Feeding ecology of *Ameiva ameiva* in a caatinga area of northeastern Brazil." *The Herpetological Journal* 21(3):199-207. Accessed April 1, 2015. <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/bhs/thj/2011/00000021/00000003/art00007>
- Greene , Brian T., Pamela M. Simmons, Kate E. Williamson, Robert Powell, and John S. Parmerlee Jr. 2005. "ECOLOGICAL INTERACTIONS WITHIN A LIZARD COMMUNITY ON GRENADA." *Herpetologica* 61(2): 124-134. Accessed April 01, 2015. <http://www.bioone.org/action/doSearch?Keyword=Ameiva%20ameiva>
- Kenny, Julian. 2008. *The Biological Diversity of Trinidad and Tobago : A Naturalist's Notes*. United States: Prospect Press
- Myfwc.com. 2015. "Nonnatives - Giant Ameiva." Accessed April 1, 2015. <http://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/nonnatives/reptiles/giant-ameiva/>
- Pianka, R. and Laurie J. Vitt. 2003. *Lizards: Windows to the Evolution of Diversity*. United States: University of California Press
- Sciencedirect.com. 1999. "Use Of Naturally And Anthropogenically Disturbed Habitats In Amazonian Rainforest By The Teiid Lizard Ameiva Ameiva" Accessed 3 April, 2015. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006320799000191>
- Siders, Ryan. 2014. "Ameiva Ameiva (Giant Ameiva, Amazon Racerunner)." Accessed April 1, 2015. http://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Ameiva_ameiva/
- ttfnc.org. 2006. "Guide to identifying common Lizard Species in Trinidad and Tobago." Accessed 2nd April, 2015. <http://ttfnc.org/photojournals/2006-3.pdf>

Author: Melissa Nathan

Posted online: 2015