

THE SNAKES OF SURINAM, PART XV: SUBFAMILY XENODON-
TINAE (GENERA TANTILLA, THAMNODYNASTES, AND
TRIPANURGOS).

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THE GENUS *TANTILLA* BAIRD & GIRARD, 1853

This genus comprises of about 47 species of which 25 are found in Central and South America. Of these, one has 2 and one has 4 subspecies. Only one species has been found in Surinam to date.

General data for the genus:

Head: Small with a short blunt snout. The head is the same width as the neck. The eyes are small and have round pupils.

Body: Cylindrical with smooth scales. The members of this genus are very small

Tail: Short.

Behaviour: Largely nocturnal and fossorial.

Food: Insects, larvae and small fish.

Habitat: Savannah and rain forest, but also cultivated areas bordering the forests.

Reproduction: Oviparous. Lays three or four eggs.

Remarks: The snakes of this genus are small and non-aggressive.

Tantilla melanocephala melanocephala (Linnaeus, 1758)

English name: Pink-headed snake or Black-headed

snake.

Dutch name: Kleine zwartkopslang.

Maximum length: Approximately 50 cm.

Scalation: Dorsals in 15 rows (smooth scales); 133-171 ventrals; 46-77 subcaudals (paired); anal scale divided; 1 preocular; 2 postoculars; loreals none; 7 upper labials (3rd and 4th touch the edge of the eye); 6 or 7 lower labials; 1+1 temporals.

Teeth: The last two teeth in the upper jaw are enlarged, grooved and separated from the other teeth by a diastema.

Colouration: The ground colour is yellow-brown to light brown. Sometimes the scales have small black spots, making the ground colour appear grey-brown. A thin black vertebral stripe runs the entire length of the body. The black head and neck is characteristic of this species. There are three cream-coloured spots on the side of the head: one next to the nostril, one slightly below and behind the eye and one at the back of the upper jaw. The belly may be cream-coloured or off-white.

Remarks: Sometimes specimens may have dark or light stripes running along their flanks. The author has only had the opportunity to examine two specimens from Surinam. One of them had a black spot on the end of each scale, giving it a darker appearance.

Distribution: Central and South America east of

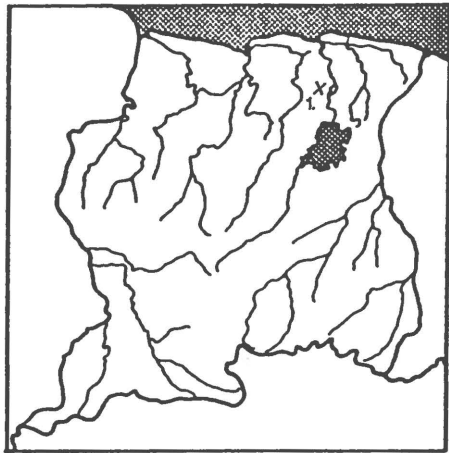




Fig. 1. *Tantilla melanocephala*. Foto: A. Abuys.



Fig. 2. *Thamnodynastes pallidus*. Foto: A. Abuys.

the Andes south to Uruguay and northern Argentina.

Locality records: 1. The savannah forest in the area of Zanderij.

THE GENUS *THAMNODYNASTES* WAGLER, 1830

This genus comprises five species of which two occur in Surinam.

General data for the genus:

Head: Slightly wider than the neck; the snout is blunt. The large eyes have vertical pupils.

Body: Cylindrical and stout. The scales are smooth or lightly keeled depending on the species.

Behaviour: Nocturnal and both terrestrial and arboreal.

Food: Lizards, frogs and fish.

Habitat: Border areas around savannah and rain forest near water; also open swamp and cultivated areas.

Reproduction: This genus is ovoviviparous.

Remarks: The members of this genus are small and slightly aggressive. Mild envenomation symptoms may follow a bite from one of these snakes.

Thamnodynastes pallidus (Linnaeus, 1758)

Dutch name: Gele stompsnuitslang.

Maximum length: Approximately 70 cm.

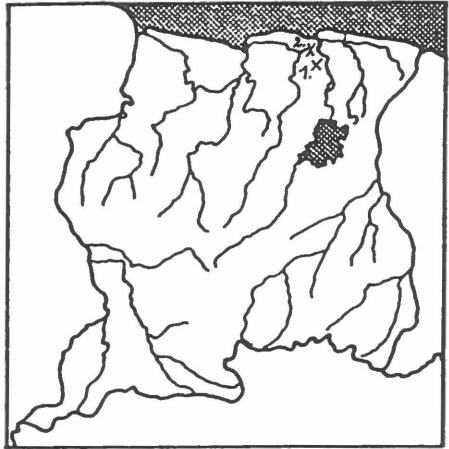
Scalation: Dorsals in 17 rows (smooth scales); 137-160 ventrals; 80-99 subcaudals (paired); a single anal scale; 1 preocular; 2 postoculars; 1 loreal; 8 upper labials (4th and 5th touch the edge of the eye); 9 or 10 lower labials; 2+2 or 2+3 temporals.

Teeth: The last two teeth in the upper jaw are enlarged, grooved and separated from the other

teeth by a diastema.

Colouration: The head is brownish and covered with numerous small round or oval spots. The side of the head has a characteristic black stripe running from the nose through the eye and to the back of the upper jaw. The ground colour is yellow-brown and the dorsum is covered with small dark brown elongate spots, which often form small crosses. The belly is slightly lighter in colour but also carries the same pattern of elongate spots. Three brownish stripes, one vertebral and two lateral, run the length of the body.

Distribution: Brazil, Peru, Venezuela and the Guianas.
Locality records in Surinam: 1. Lelydorp; 2. Boma polder.



Thammodynastes strigilis (Thunberg, 1787)

Dutch name: Bruine stompsnuitslang.

Maximum length: Approximately 80 cm.

Scalation: Dorsals in 19 rows (smooth scales);
138-164 ventrals; 55-80 subcaudals (paired);
anal scale divided; 1 preocular; 2 postoculars;
1 loreal; 8 upper labials (4th and 5th touch
the edge of the eye); 9 or 10 lower labials;
2+2 or 2+3 temporals.

Teeth: The last two teeth in the upper jaw are en-

larged, grooved and separated from the other teeth by a diastema.

Colouration: The ground colour of this species is pinkish-brown to dark grey-brown.

The pinkish-brown phase has three stripes running the length of its body: one vertebral and two lateral. Each stripe is made up of a series of small cream-coloured elongated spots. These spots form interrupted stripes which fuse together in the last third of the body thus making the striped pattern more distinct towards the tail.

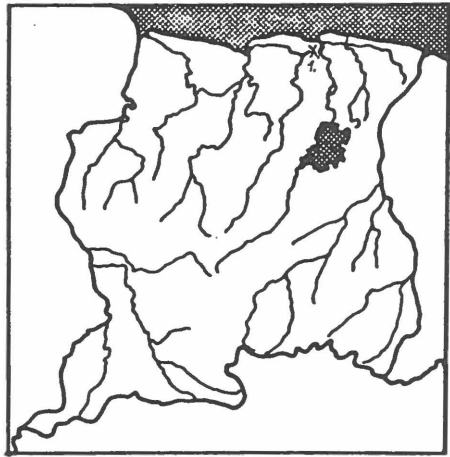
The dark grey-brown phase lacks the pattern of elongate spots, but has thin black stripes instead.

In both phases, the head is darker than the body and has a black stripe running from the nose through the eye to the back of the upper jaw.

The belly is cream-coloured to off-white and thinly scattered with small elongate spots.

In contrast to specimens of the same species from other areas, the specimens from Surinam do not have keeled scales.

Remarks: In general *Thamnodynastes strigilis* is darker in colour and has a more clearly defined pattern than *Thamnodynastes pallidus*. Mr. Wim Eriks from Paramaribo kept a *Thamnodynastes strigilis* in a terrarium for several years in Surinam. The reptile flourished



on a diet of frogs and fish. The snake would ambush the fish from above and seize them without actually entering the water.

Distribution: Northern South America.

Locality records in Surinam: 1. The area around Paramaribo (Uitvlucht).

THE GENUS *TRIPANURGOS* FITZINGER, 1843

This genus contains only one species.

General data for the genus:

Head: Oval and flattened. The head is clearly wider than the neck, The large, bulging, eyes have vertical pupils.

Body: laterally compressed with smooth scales. The scales of the vertebral row are larger than the other dorsal scales. Like typical tree snakes, members of this genus are slender bodied.

Tail: Long and thin.

Food: Lizards and frogs.

Habitat: Savannah and rain forest areas which border on rivers, creeks and swamps.

Reproduction: Oviparous.

Tripanurgos compressus (Daudin, 1803)

English name: Pseudofalse coral snake.

Dutch name: Platkop boomslang.

Maximum length: Approximately 100 cm.

Scalation: Dorsals in 19 rows (+ 2 apicals), vertebral scales larger than the rest, scales smooth; 231-258 ventrals; 106-125 subcaudals; a single anal scale; 1 preocular; 2 postoculars; 1 loreal; 8 upper labials (4th and 5th touch the edge of the eye); 9 lower labials; 2+3 temporals.

Teeth: The last two teeth in the upper jaw are enlarged, grooved and separated from the other



Fig. 3. *Thammodynastes strigilis*. Foto: A. Abuys.



Fig. 4. *Tripanurgos compressus*. Foto: A. Abuys.

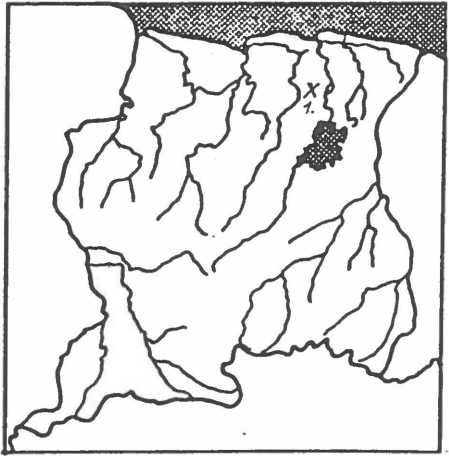
teeth by a diastema.

Colouration: The ground-colour is red-brown with black bands. The red-brown areas are about three times as wide as the black. There is a large black saddle which covers the neck and the fore part of the body. The belly is greyish-white to light grey-brown.

Remarks: The author has collected only one specimen. It was caught in an area where savannah forest bordered on a swamp. Many species of frogs were present there in abundance during the rainy season.

Distribution: South America, down the coast of Brazil as far as Rio de Janeiro. Also Panama and Trinidad.

Locality records in Surinam: 1. Bosbivak at Zanderij.



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