

Oxyrhopus petolarius (False Coral Snake)

Family: Dipsadidae (Rear-fanged Snakes)

Order: Squamata (Lizards and Snakes)

Class: Reptilia (Reptiles)



Fig. 1. False coral snake, *Oxyrhopus petolarius*.

[<http://www.fieldherpforum.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=12448>, downloaded 25 October 2016]

TRAITS. The coloration of the false coral or calico snake *Oxyrhopus petolarius* varies, but is usually similar to a coral snake (genus *Micrurus*), which it mimics. It normally consists of some combination of black and red rings or cross bands. In some the pale-coloured cross bands can be white instead of red on the anterior part of the body (Fig. 1) (Boulenger, 1896). The dorsal scales are smooth, with apical pits present, and are organized in rows of 19 at mid-body (Boulenger, 1896). Sexual dimorphism of the colour pattern is not visible for any population of this species (Bailey, 1970). It is possible for an adult *Oxyrhopus petolarius* to grow to be as long as 91cm, including a tail which maybe be 22cm long (Boulenger, 1896).

DISTRIBUTION. *Oxyrhopus petolarius* resides from Mexico, throughout Central America, to Bolivia and south-eastern Brazil in South America (Bailey, 1970), including both Trinidad and Tobago.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY. *Oxyrhopus petolarius* mostly hunts at night and on land, with some records of arboreal and diurnal activity, and it lives in both open and forested areas (Costa et al., 2010; McCranie, 2011). *Oxyrhopus petolarius* can consume a variety of food so it known as a food generalist, its diet in the wild is made up of lizards, birds and small mammals sometimes snakes, amphibians and eggs of birds (Solórzano, 2004; Gaiarsa et al., 2013). *Anolis* lizards seem to be poisoned badly by the venom of *Oxyrhopus petolarius* (Boos, 2001).

REPRODUCTION. Scientific literature is limited relating to the reproductive biology *Oxyrhopus petolarius*. Eight near-term eggs were found in Colombia in October 2006, which was early spring, suggesting a seasonal reproductive pattern (Lynch, 2009). A captive female laid seven eggs in June 1960, which was late fall (Test et al., 1966).

BEHAVIOUR. *Oxyrhopus petolarius* displays courtship behaviour of head and chin movement by the male over the body of the female, which was succeeded by copulation (Zacariotti and del Rio do Valle, 2010).

APPLIED BIOLOGY. *Oxyrhopus petolarius* is not dangerously venomous to humans.

REFERENCES

- Bailey, J.R. (1970): *Oxyrhopus*. In: Catalogue of the Neotropical Squamata: Part 1, Snakes. p. 229-235. Peters, J.A., Orejas- Miranda, B., Eds., Washington, Bulletin of the United States National Museum 297.
- Boos, H.E.A. (2001): *The Snakes of Trinidad and Tobago*. College Station, Texas A&M University Press.
- Boulenger, G.A. 1896. Catalogue of the Snakes in the British Museum (Natural History). Volume III., Containing the Colubridæ (Opisthoglyphæ and Proteroglyphæ),... Trustees of the British Museum (Natural History). (Taylor and Francis, Printers.) London. xiv + 727 pp. + Plates I.- XXV. (*Oxyrhopus petolarius*, pp. 101-103.)
- Costa, H.C., Pantoja, D.L., Pontes, J.L., Feio, R.N. (2010): Serpentes do Município de Viçosa, Mata Atlântica do Sudeste do Brasil. *Biota Neotropica* 10(3): 353-377.
- Gaiarsa, M.P., Alencar, L.R.V., Martins, M. (2013): Natural History of Pseudoboine Snakes. *Papéis Avulsos de Zoologia* 53(19): 261-283.
- Lynch, J.D. (2009): Snakes of the genus *Oxyrhopus* (Colubridae: Squamata) in Colombia: taxonomy and geographic variation. *Papéis Avulsos de Zoologia* 49(25): 319-337.
- McCranie, J.R. (2011): *The Snakes of Honduras: Systematics, Distribution and Conservation*. Salt Lake City, SSAR.
- Solorzano, A. (2004): *Serpientes de Costa Rica – Snakes of Costa Rica*. Santo Domingo de Heredia, Editorial INBio.
- Test, F. H., Sexton, O. J., Heatwole, H. (1966): Reptiles of Rancho Grande and vicinity, Estado Aragua, Venezuela. *Miscel. Pub. Mus. Zoo. U. Michigan* 128: 1-63.
- Zacariotti, R. L., del Rio do Valle, R. (2010): Observation of mating in the calico snake *Oxyrhopus petola* Linnaeus, 1758. *Herpetology Notes* 3: 139-140.

Author: Akeem K. Ansolia

Posted online: 2016