

THE SNAKES OF SURINAM, PART XIII: SUBFAMILY XENO-  
DONTINAE (GENERA PSEUDOERYX, PSEUSTES, AND RHADI-  
NAEA).

By: A. Abuys, Jukwerderweg 31, 9901 GL Appingedam, The Netherlands.

Contents: The genus *Pseudoeryx* - The genus *Pseustes* - The genus *Rhadinaea* - References.

THE GENUS *PSEUDOERYX* FITZINGER, 1826

This genus consists of only one species and three subspecies of which only one occurs in Surinam.

General data of the genus:

Head: The pointed and tapered snout is part of a head which is hardly wider than the muscular neck. The two internasals are fused together, and are more or less responsible for the pointed snout. This characteristic is a distinguishing feature of the genus. The eyes are small and the pupils are round.

Body: Short and thick with smooth scales.

Behaviour: Aquatic and nocturnal.

Food: Mostly fish and frogs.

Habitat: Areas of dense vegetation along rivers, swamps and channels.

Reproduction: *Pseudoeryx* gives birth to live young (ovoviviparous).

Specific details: This genus is generally not aggressive, but will bite under extreme provocation.

The fused internasals are also characteristic of the genera *Helicops* and *Hydrops*.

Pseudoeryx plicatilis plicatilis (Linnaeus, 1758)

Dutch name: Bruine waterslang.

Surinam name: Walapa-sneki or Ontiman-sneki.

Maximum length: 150 cm.

Scalation: Dorsals in 15 rows (smooth scales); 132-143 ventrals; 35-45 subcaudals; anal plate single or divided; 1 preocular; 2 postoculars; loreals absent; 8 upper labials (3rd and 4th, or sometimes only the latter, touch the eye); 8 lower labials; 1+1 temporals (sometimes 1+2).

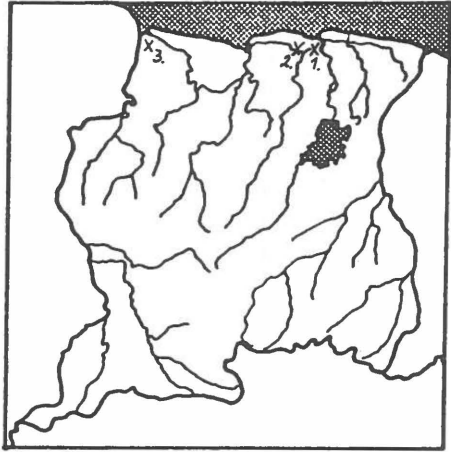
Teeth: No enlarged teeth are present and there is also no diastema to be found between the back teeth and the rest.

Colouration: The overall colour of the head and the dorsal surface is dark olive-brown or sometimes dark purple-brown. On the side of the head, there is a black line which runs from the nose to the back of the jaw. After a small break, this line continues to stretch down the entire length of the body. This lateral stripe (which contains small yellow spots) covers the third row of scales plus half of the second and half of the fourth row. The labials and the belly are mostly yellow. Most of the ventral scales each have four small black dots of which the outer dots are bigger than the inner ones. They form four rows of dots along the belly.

Remarks: I caught one specimen in the suburbs of Paramaribo. This means that, since this species is able to penetrate populated areas (as long as there are fish and frogs available) these areas have become part of its habitat.

Distribution: The whole of the northern part of South America through northern Argentina.

Locality records in Surinam: 1. The botanical gardens in Paramaribo; 2. The ferry at Monks-hoop; 3. Nickerie (Henar-polder).



### THE GENUS *PSEUSTES* FITZINGER, 1843

This genus comprises four species of which one has four subspecies and another three. Two species are found in Surinam.

General data of the genus:

Head: The head is clearly wider than the neck.

The eyes are large with round pupils.

Body: Slim and flattened from side to side. The scales are, depending on the species or subspecies, keeled in a variable number of dorsal rows.

Tail: long and thin.

Behaviour: Terrestrial and semi-arboreal. Active during the day (diurnal). This species has no problem traversing large expanses of open water.

Food: Birds, birds eggs, young birds (chicks); occasionally chicken coops are raided for chicks. Lizards and small mammals are also readily accepted.

Prey is usually constricted unless it is too small to require overpowering in this way.

Habitat: Mostly around the edges of savannah fo-

rests and rain forests but also near farms outside the cities.

Reproduction: These snakes are egg layers (oviparous) and usually lay about eleven eggs in a clutch.

Specific details: The teeth of the upper jaw become longer towards the back of the jaw.

These snakes have two ways of defending themselves. The first one is passive: imitating a liana, the so-called "monkey-ladder". The vertically flattened body is brought into a position which is a combination of swinging and waving. The second tactic is not at all unusual: aggression. The snake raises the fore part of its body from the ground and inflates its neck. At the same time it vibrates its tail violently. When approached too closely it attacks by striking with its mouth open.

*Pseustes poecilonotus polylepis* (Peters, 1867)

English name: Liana snake or Bird eating snake.

Dutch name: Platkop liaanslang or Bol-oog liaanslang.

Maximum length: About 210 cm.

Scalation: Dorsals in 23 or 25 rows (with 2 apicals and 5 to 11 lightly keeled rows); 187-210 ventrals; 109-136 subcaudals (in 2 rows); anal plate single; 1 preocular (vertically elongate); 2 postoculars; 1 loreal; 8 upper labials (sometimes 7 or 9); 13 lower labials (sometimes 12 or 14); 2+2 temporals (sometimes 2+3 or 3+2).

Colouration: The slightly flattened head and the large bulging eyes are an extra distinguishing mark for this species. Generally speaking, this species' colour patterns are comprised of dorsal (red-brown and dark olive-green) and ventral (yellow-orange and yellow) differentiations.

The only snake of this species which I was able



Fig. 1. *Pseudoeryx plicatilis*. Foto: A. Abuys.



Fig. 2. *Pseustes poecilonotus*. Foto: A. Abuys.

to catch in Surinam was completely chocolate-brown above and yellow-orange underneath. Young snakes (under 90 cm) are supposed to have cross-bands of the same dorsal colour, except darker.

Distribution: The Brazilian Amazon basin, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Venezuela, The Guianas, and Trinidad.

Locality records in Surinam: 1. The area around Zanderij; 2. The turn-off to Tibiti (a specimen found dead on the road).



*Pseustes sulphureus dieperinkii* (Schlegel, 1837)

English name: Puffing snake.

Dutch name: Bruine liaanslang.

Maximum length: About 220 cm.

Scalation: Dorsals in 21 rows (with 2 apicals; all rows are lightly keeled except the first and second rows); 216-221 ventrals; 129-145 subcaudals (in 2 rows); anal plate single; 1 preocular; 3 postoculars; 1 loreal; 8 upper labials (4th and 5th touch the eye); 10 lower labials; 1+1 temporals.

Colouration: The only specimen which I was able to obtain in Surinam was uniform brown above, while its head was more olive-brown. Its ventral scales were each half tan and half grey-brown. The total effect was a light shade of grey-brown.

Distribution: Only known to be found in Surinam.

Locality records in Surinam: 1. One specimen presumably from Kwamelasamoetoe; 2. Paramaribo (type locality).



*Pseustes sulphureus sulphureus* (Wagler, 1824)

English name: Yellow-bellied puffing snake or Black-tailed golden snake.

Dutch name: Zwartgele liaanslang.

Surinam name: Trangabakka.

Maximum length: About 300 cm.

Scalation: Dorsals in 21 rows (with 2 apicals; all rows are slightly keeled except the first and the second rows); 205-227 ventrals; 119-146 subcaudals (in 2 rows); anal plate single; 1 preocular; 3 postoculars (sometimes 2); 1 loreal; 8 upper labials (4th and 5th touch the eye); 10 lower labials (sometimes 11); 2+2 temporals (sometimes 1+2).

Colouration: In Surinam, this species is generally dark brown to black above with yellow bands. Often, the irregularly spaced cross-bands are narrow and/or vague. Only when the snake has inflated its body do these bands become clearly visible. This snake is easily confused with the Chicken snake (*Spilotes pullatus pullatus*). The following chart below illustrates some of the differences between the two species:

	<i>Pseustes sulphureus sulphureus</i>	<i>Spilotes pullatus pullatus</i>
Head	brown	black
Postoculars	3	2
Lower labials	10 or 11	6 or 7
Temporals	2+2	1+1 or 1+2
Dorsal rows	21	18

This species also includes occasional specimens which look like the Surinamese Indigo snake (*Drymarchon corais corais*), except that the order of the colour pattern is just the other way around. This means that the fore part of the body is brownish yellow with an occasional set of black cross-bands and that the hind-part is dark brown to black with an occasional set of yellow cross-bands. Also, the snake's belly will have two colours: the proximal third of its belly will be orange-yellow while the rest will be dark grey.

Distribution: Equatorial Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, the Guianas, and Trinidad.

Locality records in Surinam: 1. Zanderij (Cola Creek), where one was observed and identified by its defensive behaviour; 2. Mr. J. Moonen found a dead specimen on





the Bauxite road near Powaka, a village about 20 km from Zanderij.

THE GENUS *RHADINAEA* COPE, 1863

This genus consists of a total of forty species, of which 24 species occur on the continent of South America and a few of the surrounding islands. Only one species is found in Surinam.

General data of the genus:

Head: The head is slightly wider than the neck.

The eyes have round pupils.

Body: Slender with smooth scales. All the snakes of this genus are rather small.

Tail: Slender.

Behaviour: Terrestrial and diurnal.

Food: Small animals; mostly frogs, lizards and small snakes.

Habitat: On the ground in savannah- and rain forests. This genus does not avoid extremely damp areas.

Reproduction: Egg layers (oviparous).

Specific details: This genus is not aggressive.

*Rhadinaea brevirostis* (Peters, 1863)

Dutch name: Kleine bruine bosslang.

Maximum length: About 60 cm.

Scalation: Dorsals in 17 rows (smooth scales); 142-175 ventrals; 39-66 subcaudals (in 2 rows); anal plate divided; 1 preocular (sometimes 2); 2 postoculars; 1 loreal; 8 upper labials (3rd, 4th and 5th touch the eye); 9 lower labials (sometimes 8); 1+2 temporals.

Teeth: The last pair of teeth in the upper jaw is enlarged and separated from the rest by a diastema.



Fig. 3. *Pseustes sulphureus sulphureus*. Foto: W. Eriks.

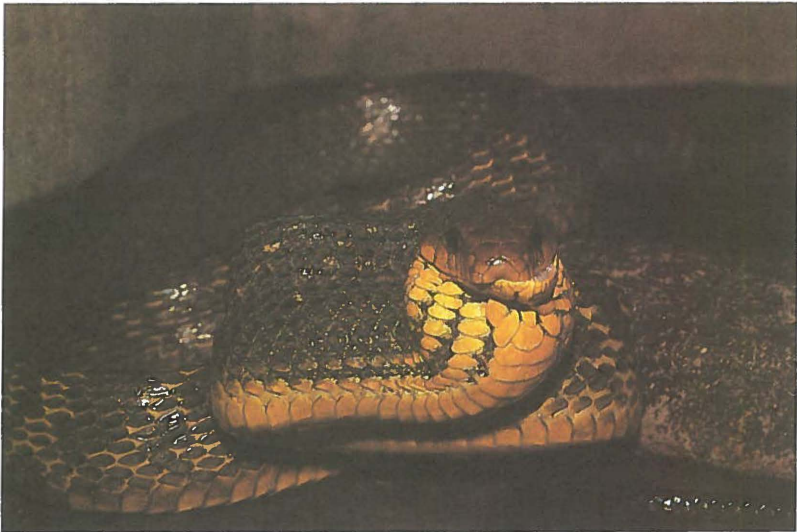


Fig. 4. *Pseustes sulphureus sulphureus*. Foto: J. de Bruin.

Colouration: The basic colour is yellow-brown or light grey-brown. A broad dark brown vertebral stripe runs down the entire length of the body. Directly behind the head are five to six beige spots in two rows, which border the vertebral stripe. This pattern becomes vague after the fifth or sixth set of spots and then melts into the ground colour.

Sometimes there is another set of stripes running parallel to the vertebral stripe, one stripe on each flank. In this case it is better to refer to a dark brown ground-colour with two yellow-brown dorsal stripes.

The belly is off white.

Remarks: One specimen, from the camp at Zanderij, escaped before I could take any good pictures of it. It struck me that this snake, which was about 40 cm long, was gentle and non-aggressive. Later, I was able to make a photograph of a dead specimen which had been preserved in alcohol. This animal was found near the village of Brownsweg, although I do not know who caught it. In 1982, Mr. J. de Bruin took photographs of a specimen from Kwamelasamoetoe (in the interior of Surinam). This specimen was part of a collection belonging to Mr. T. Henzen, who is an animal dealer.

Distribution: The Amazon basin and from the Guianas to Bolivia.

Locality records in Surinam: 1. The camp at Zanderij; 2. The village of Brownsweg; 3. Kwamelasamoetoe.



## REFERENCES

- Beebe, William, 1946. Field notes on the snakes of Kartabo, British Guiana and Caripito, Venezuela. *Zoologica, Bull. N.Y. Zool. Soc.*, Vol. 31 (1): 11-31.