



Department of Planning and Natural Resources
Division of Fish and Wildlife
U.S.V.I. Animal Fact Sheet #20
Virgin Islands Tree boa
Epicrates monensis granti



Background

There are two subspecies of the boa *Epicrates monensis*. The Mona boa (*Epicrates monensis monensis*), is only found on Mona Island west of Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands tree boa (*Epicrates monensis granti*), which is found on Puerto Rico and the U.S. and British Virgin Islands. The VI tree boa, worm snake, racer, and the garden snake are the only snakes found in the territory.

In 1979 the VI tree boa was listed as an endangered species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It is also listed on Appendix I of the Convention on the Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which lists the world's most critically imperiled species.

Tree boas may live longer than 25 years. Like most boas, the tree boa is nocturnal-although occasionally they may be found basking in the sun during the day. In daytime they are usually found under rocks or logs. They may grow to become 41 inches in length.



Common Names

The tree boa is also called the “Culebrón de la Sabana”, by Spanish speakers, because of the dry savannah-like habitats they live in.

Description

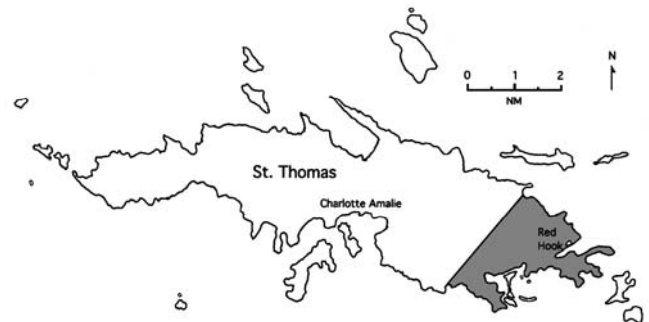
The VI tree boa is easily identified within its entire range, as it is the only native snake with blotches. The body in adults is a light brown, with chestnut blotches edged in black. A newly shed boa will have a blue-purple iridescence as well. The juveniles are a light grey with black blotches, and change to the adult coloration as they mature.

Classification

The VI tree boa is a reptile, like all snakes. It belongs to the family Boidae, in the order Squamata, suborder Serpentes. All boas are constrictors; they suffocate their prey by squeezing it and are not venomous.

Distribution & Habitat

Tree boas are found on the east end of St. Thomas and on a few offshore cays. They generally live in xeric (dry) habitat, which is characterized by poor rocky soils, in scrub-woodland or subtropical dry forest. Although the VI Tree boa has been found on Virgin Gorda, Tortola, and other low profile cays on the Puerto Rico Bank none have been found on St. John.



Location of VI Tree boa habitat on the east end of St. Thomas, USVI.

Diet

Anoles are the preferred food item for the tree boa, although they may also eat hatchling iguanas, nestling birds, or mice. From limited observations of snakes hunting they seem to glide along tree branches looking for sleeping lizards. The lizards and other prey are constricted before being swallowed headfirst and whole.

Reproduction

The VI tree boa, like most boas, is viviparous. There is a primitive placental attachment from the mother to the young. Gravid adult females thermoregulate during gestation, or pregnancy, which lasts about 150 days. The young are born alive in litters of 2-10 depending on the size of the mother. They usually produce young biennially, or every other year, but if food is scarce it may only be every third or fourth year. The young are usually born in late August through October. Baby tree boas are self-sufficient at birth and must hunt food successfully within three weeks if they are to stay alive. There is no maternal care.



Status in the VI

To help ensure the long-term survival of the VI tree boa, the Division of Fish and Wildlife has reintroduced this species to offshore cays that are free of rats and mongooses by relocating boas brought in by the public and releasing captive born animals from the Toledo Zoo.

In the absence of these predators, the tree boa has the potential to achieve high population densities, sometimes greater than 50 snakes per acre. A recent survey of the VI tree boa population has determined that the snakes are

successfully breeding and thriving on some of the offshore cays.

What you can do to HELP

1. Please call the Division of Fish and Wildlife, 340-775-6762 St. Thomas if you see any VI tree boas in danger of being injured or killed.
2. Leave tree boas alone if they are not in danger. They are not venomous and they pose no threat to humans. The boa is nocturnal and hides whenever there are lights shining. It is illegal to capture them and they do not make good pets.
3. Reduce the amount of pesticides and chemicals used to control pests. This will help the VI tree boa.
4. If you find a VI tree boa in danger, for example in the middle of a construction site, or a dead boa, please place it in a container (so that if it is alive it can breathe), and bring it to the Division of Fish and Wildlife at Red Hook.
5. Remember, it is illegal to take, catch, possess, injure, harass, or kill any indigenous or endangered species. The only exceptions are for people holding valid permits from the Division of Fish and Wildlife.
7. For more information on this and other animals in the Virgin Islands please visit our website at:

www.vifishandwildlife.com

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FOR MORE INFORMATION ON OUR NATIVE ANIMALS CONTACT

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