

# Reptiles on Huevos

By Hans Boos

The Island of Huevos, being separated from the Trinidad mainland by two bodies of water, and from the Venezuela land mass by even greater stretches, was extremely interesting from the point of view of the presence of reptilian fauna.

It was during the visit of the Field Naturalists Club to this, the second in the chain of islands between Trinidad and Venezuela, that I decided to carry out an experiment. I had 12 lizards, *Anolis roquet cinereus*, from Barbados, 6 males and 6 females, which I proposed to release on the Island in a fixed location on our first exploratory visit, and check for dispersal and survival on our second visit, two weeks later.

I hoped to make observations on the following points:-

(1) **Survival.**

*Anolis roquet cinereus* is unaccustomed in its natural habitat to —

**a Other Reptile Predators**

It was not known if there were any snakes on Huevos, that would prey on lizards such as *Anolis*, but *Drymobius boddaerti* had been taken on Monos the year before, by a similar expedition, and it seemed reasonable to suppose that this snake should also be on Huevos.

**b Competition with other Iguanids**

In Barbados, there are no other Iguanid lizards. (*Anolis aeneus* are found on Gaspar Grande Island, and no *Anolis* have been reported from Monos Island to date.)

**c Change in Conditions**

Climate, and food supply. Huevos is in some respects similar to Barbados. It can be hot and dry as well as humid in the rainy season. There is only one house on Huevos, whereas in Barbados these lizards, though found throughout the island, get a great deal of their food supply from the houses.

**d Other Predators**

The types of birds that might prey on these introductions, would be different to those they were accustomed to in Barbados.

Due to these adverse conditions, it was doubtful that these lizards stood much chance of survival.

(2) **Dispersal.**

The lizards were to be released some distance from the natural bush on the island, in conditions similar to what they were accustomed. Checks were to be made to ascertain if they had sought different surroundings to cope with new conditions.

On arrival, on our first visit, I checked the open areas surrounding the house, and there were no signs or sightings of other Iguanid lizards, that is, **Anolis**.

I released all the lizards on a large Almond tree that closely resembled the convolutions of the Banyan trees on which the lizards were caught. This tree was about 60'-70' from the house and the other trees were coco-nut palms and other trees, all about 30' away. Several sheds could offer protection. The sea was 30' from the base of the tree and the natural bush was between 70' and 100' inland from the tree. All these conditions closely resembled the natural habitat of **Anolis roquet cinereus**.

On our return to the island two weeks later one of the first things that I observed that would bode ill for any offspring of the aliens, was the presence, on the very same tree, of a large colony of predacious Iguanids, **Plica plica**.

It is strange that such a number of these large lizards were not noted on our first visit, and it is perhaps due to the fact that on that occasion we were there in the latter portion of the afternoon and these lizards were at that time, either high up in the branches of the tree, or hidden in the large hollows in the tree trunk.

Further observations proved that **Plica** was all over the island, and several were caught and shipped to Prof. Charles C. Carpenter of Oklahoma University in the U. S. A.

Throughout the second visit, a constant watch was kept to try to see any of the aliens, but only one male was sighted high up in the release tree, a place, though not unlikely, unusual for these lizards, It would seem that the feeding locale, low around the trunk where insects abound, had been taken up by the more aggressive **Plica**. There were no other sightings on any of the other trees, buildings or bush, and until further information is furnished it can only be concluded that **Anolis roquet cinereus** had failed to establish itself in unfamiliar and unfriendly surroundings. The capture of a snake, on the second day of our visit, **Drymobius**, further proof of unfamiliar predators, lends weight to this supposition.

Our expedition was blighted by rainy weather and it was only during the brief periods of sunshine that we were able to collect and record some of the sun-loving types of reptiles.

A large bronze skink, **Mabuya aeneus**, was caught while it was sunning itself on a pile of rocks. Mr. French, the leader of the expedition, braved several sharp bites, but managed to catch a beautiful specimen of **Drymobius boddaerti**, or Machete Couresse.

This snake is possibly the same species as on the mainland, but it was a brighter olive green, with a bright yellow lower jaw, upper and lower labials and throat which faded to a uniform light green belly.

While digging away the damp sand on the beach to make a platform for my bed I unearthed what appeared at first to be a bright emerald green frog, but as I got over my surprise I saw it was a male **Cnemidophorus** lizard and I quickly caught it. In one of the sunnier periods I caught it a mate. She was chased and trapped in an old clay oven. The sexual differences in these lizards are very pronounced, the male being bright turquoise, and emerald green, with tints of sky blue, and light olive on the undersides of the lower body and tail, the female being a polished grey olive brown, with marked stripes of dirty white, running along the back and flanks, finally disappearing on the tail. These lizards lived many months in captivity, the female languishing when she went off her food, and the male finally choked to death, having eaten an **Anolis chrysolepis**, that was one half its own size.

Several times, during our climbs up the main ridge of Huevos, the crashings of Iguanas, (**Iguana iguana**,) could be heard as they quit their perches at our approach, and crashing to the ground scurried away. Mr. Raymond Manuel sighted many on his collecting forays.

I was in for another surprise when a large female **Anolis chrysolepis** was taken halfway up the hill side. This ground-living Anole is found in the heavily forested areas, and the cocoa and coffee areas of the mainland.

**Gonatodes vittatus** were seen around the main house and other trees and buildings, and what was possibly **Gonatodes humeralis** was seen but escaped capture on a tree trunk on the hill side.

Sightings were made of what could have been **Gymnophthalmus**, or **Scelecosaurus**, but until a specimen is taken this remains to be verified.

Thus, we were able to record an unexpected wealth of reptiles on what at first appeared to be a dry and barren island.

The list of reptiles taken and identified is as follows :

<b>LIZARDS</b>	<b>FAMILY</b>
<i>Plica plica</i>	Iguanidae
<i>Anolis chrysolepis</i>	''
<i>Iguana iguana</i>	''
<i>Cnemidophorus l. lemniscatus</i>	Tejidae
<i>Mabuya aeneus</i>	Scincidae
<i>Gonatodes vittatus</i>	Gekkonidae

**SNAKES**

<i>Drymobius boddaerti</i>	Colubridae
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