

President Mejia has been a strong supporter of the development of National Parks for tourism or mining, and has issued several decrees authorizing private companies to begin development. The only obstacle, however, has been that, at the onset of this administration, Mejia had signed Environmental Law 64-00, which established guidelines for the conservation of natural resources. The new bill that is moving ahead in Congress would resolve this impasse and enable unchecked development

of the new areas by companies chosen by the Mejia government.

Dominican Legislature Passes the Revised Protected Areas Law

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Today, the Dominican Congress approved the Protected Areas Law with significant changes that drastically reduce and render unsustainable the Dominican System of Protected Areas. The two areas that have suffered the most are Parque Nacional Jaragua and Parque Nacional del Este. The struggle by Dominican and international environmentalists continues, but is becoming more and more difficult. The bill will now pass to the President for approval — but he has stated publicly on several occasions that he favors it.

SPECIES PROFILE

Leiocephalus semilineatus

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Nine species of Hispaniolan Curly-tailed Lizards (Genus *Leiocephalus*) are currently recognized. Of these, *L. semilineatus* is the smallest, with a maximum known snout-vent length of 53 mm. In addition to its small size, this species is distinguished by the light-bordered, dark brown lateral stripes that begin as a mask and extend onto the body before fading near the hindlimbs. These fading lateral stripes are responsible for the species' scientific name.

The species is known from the Llanos de Azua and also from the Valle de Neiba of the Dominican Republic through the Cul-de-Sac plain of Haiti. The latter area is largely below sea level and is a remnant of the marine channel that once separated the North and South paleoislands that joined to form Hispaniola. An apparent hiatus in the range separates those two areas.

These little lizards are found in extremely dry habitats and may be among the most drought-tolerant of Hispaniolan lizards. They frequently occur in sympatry with *Ameiva lineolata*, a very small member of its genus and equally xerophilic (from the Greek meaning "dry-loving"). Although both species feed primarily on small arthropods, they apparently avoid most competition with one another by employing different foraging strategies. *Leiocephalus semilineatus*, like all of its congeners, is a sit-and-wait forager. Using an elevated perch on a rock or log, these lizards respond to movement by ambushing their prey. In contrast, *Ameiva lineolata*, is an active forager, constantly on the move and rooting in surface litter, while searching for anything edible. Although their diets overlap, a large proportion of that taken by *L. semilineatus* is composed of insects, such as ants and beetles, that move and attract the attention of lizards, whereas that of *A. lineolata* includes many prey items, such as pupae and larvae, that rest immobile under surface debris and would escape the notice of a sit-and-wait forager.

Like other Curlytails, *L. semilineatus* coils its tail. Unlike some members of the genus, however, the tail is never curled vertically over the lizard's body. The reasons for this behavior are unknown, although luring insect prey, communication, and confusing predators have been mentioned as possibilities.

References

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- Nelson, S.E. and R. Powell. 2002. *Leiocephalus semilineatus*. *Catalogue of American Amphibians and Reptiles* (751): 1–2.
- Powell, R. 2002. Species Profile: *Leiocephalus personatus*. *Iguana Times* 9: 80.



An adult male *Leiocephalus semilineatus* from near Hatillo, Azua Province, Dominican Republic. Photograph by Robert Powell.