

SPECIES PROFILE

Saw-scaled Curlytail (*Leiocephalus carinatus*)

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Photographs by John Binns.

Curlytail Lizards (Genus *Leiocephalus*) occur in the Bahamas, Turks & Caicos Islands, Swan Island (in the western Caribbean), Cayman Islands, Cuba, and Hispaniola. Extinct forms are known from Navassa (situated between Jamaica and Hispaniola) and Martinique (in the Lesser Antilles). The Saw-scaled Curlytail (*L. carinatus*) is widespread in the Bahamas and on Cuba, with additional populations on Swan Island and the Cayman Islands. Thirteen subspecies are currently recognized, suggesting that such a widely distributed form comprised of many insular populations may actually represent a species complex.



Although males are highly territorial, home ranges of several females may overlap with that of a single male.



Individuals usually are quite wary and closely watch any potential threat. If approached too closely, lizards quickly retreat into burrows or crevices.

Leiocephalus carinatus varius occurs on Swan Island and Grand Cayman Island, whereas *L. c. granti* is abundant on Little Cayman Island and on Cayman Brac. Like others in the complex, these are large Curlytails. Although males are larger than females, individuals of both sexes can exceed 100 mm snout-vent lengths (SVL), with the largest males approaching 130 mm SVL.

Like other Curlytails, these lizards are exclusively diurnal, tolerant of hot, dry conditions, and often extremely wary. Their habit of curling their tails like a watchspring over their backs led to the Cuban common name, *perrito* (= little dog). Caymanian populations are primarily coastal and individuals are locally common on beaches where resources (food and shelter) are abundant.

Males are aggressively territorial and will fight savagely when behavioral displays involving lateral presentations, head bobbing, strutting, and inflating the sides of their necks fail to discourage an interloper. The home ranges of several females may overlap with that of a single male.

Reference

Schwartz, A. and R.W. Henderson. 1991. *Amphibians and Reptiles of the West Indies: Descriptions, Distributions, and Natural History*. University of Florida Press, Gainesville.



Leiocephalus carinatus scavenging a dead fish on Little Cayman Island. Curlytail diets have been described as "catholic," and they quite willingly consume buds, flowers, seeds, and fruits of many plants along with a variety of small invertebrate prey. They regularly scavenge and may become quite tame in situations where they are fed or can forage on abundant food scraps. Large males in at least some populations of some species are cannibalistic.