

SPECIES PROFILE

The Mangrove Treeboa (*Corallus ruschenbergerii*)

Robert W. Henderson

Milwaukee Public Museum

The Neotropical treeboa genus *Corallus* is currently comprised of six species with mainland distributions from Guatemala to southeastern Brazil, including insular populations off Brazil, Venezuela, and Panama. Two additional species occur in the West Indies on the St. Vincent and Grenada banks.

The two largest of the eight species are the Emerald Treeboa (*Corallus caninus*) and the Mangrove (or Caribbean Coastal) Treeboa (*Corallus ruschenbergerii*). *Corallus caninus* has a broad distribution in the Amazon basin and the Guianas. *Corallus ruschenbergerii* has a more limited range from southern Costa Rica, through Panama, and into northern Colombia, northern Venezuela (including Isla Margarita), and Trinidad and Tobago. These snakes probably do not occur sympatrically (or syntopically) with *C. caninus*. This species is probably the longest of the treeboas with a total length reaching or surpassing 2.5 m.

Corallus ruschenbergerii exhibits a wide range of dorsal coloration, including dingy yellow, subdued shades of red, gray, and a variety of shades of brown. The dorsal pattern usually is composed of rhomboidal shapes, although this pattern is not always discernible.

Mangrove Treeboas are nocturnal and forage in trees and bushes. The boas forage actively by moving slowly through the vegetation with frequent tongue-flicks on leaf and branch surfaces, or they use a sit-and-wait (= ambush) strategy, wherein they assume a head-down posture and wait for prey to come to them. Younger (smaller) snakes use the active foraging mode and older (larger) individuals exhibit the ambush strategy. This coincides with an ontogenetic shift in diet from predominantly birds in smaller boas to one primarily of rodents (murids, including introduced *Mus* and *Rattus*) in large snakes. Bats are consumed occasionally, and *C. ruschenbergerii* from Costa Rica and Panama are known to eat Basilisk lizards (*Basiliscus* spp.).

Although the Mangrove Treeboa lives up to its common name and occurs in mangrove habitat in every country throughout its geographic range, it also lives in a variety of other habitats, including rainforest, gallery forest, and deciduous forest. It often is associated with water, and is particularly abundant along the shores of lakes, rivers, reservoirs, and marine coastal situations (Caribbean Sea). Like other members of the *Corallus hortulanus* complex (*C. cookii*, *C. grenadensis*, and *C. hortulanus*), all of which are typically inhabitants of edge habitat, Mangrove Treeboas are frequently encountered in highly disturbed situations such as road cuts and even around (and occasionally in) people's homes.

Reference

Henderson, R.W. 2002. *Neotropical Treeboas: Natural History of the Corallus hortulanus Complex*. Krieger Publ. Co., Malabar, FL.



A Mangrove Treeboa (*Corallus ruschenbergerii*). Photograph by Richard A. Sajdak.