

SPECIES PROFILE

Hispaniolan Vinesnakes

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The term “vinesnake” applies to several genera of long, slender, usually arboreal snakes and is descriptive rather than taxonomic (i.e., vinesnakes look alike but are not necessarily related). On Hispaniola, one endemic genus (*Uromacer*) includes three species that share the structural characteristics of all vinesnakes, are mostly arboreal (even sleeping coiled on the ends of branches), and are egg-laying opisthoglyphs (rear-fanged).

Uromacer catesbyi reaches a maximum snout-vent length (SVL) of about 0.8 m. Adults are bright green, with or without light lateral lines; hatchlings have green heads but gray to tan bodies. Although elongate, these snakes are much less slender than their congeners. A wider head and a stouter body facilitate capture and consumption of relatively large prey, including many treefrogs. Other prey items are invariably lizards, usually anoles. These snakes spend most of their time in trees, but may engage in extensive forays on the ground. Individuals employ both sit-and-wait (for anoles) and active (for treefrogs) foraging strategies. This species is found islandwide on Hispaniola.

Uromacer oxyrhynchus reaches a maximum SVL of about 1.5 m. Most adults are green above and tan below, but some individuals are entirely green and a very few entirely tan. All possess white lateral lines that extend almost the entire length of the body. These snakes feed exclusively on lizards, mostly anoles, but also on ground-dwelling *Leiocephalus* and *Ameiva*. The species is widely

distributed across the North Paleoisland (north of the Cul-de-Sac Plaine/Valle de Neiba), although it has successfully invaded the South Island.

Uromacer frenatus reaches a maximum SVL of a little less than 1 m. Heads are usually green, but body color may vary from green to gray to tan or brown. If lateral lines are present, they fade before reaching midbody. These exceedingly elongate snakes feed exclusively on lizards, especially anoles, but also substantial numbers of terrestrial *Leiocephalus* and *Ameiva*. Although largely arboreal, individuals may assume a sit-and-wait posture near the ground, waiting for ground-dwelling lizards. These snakes are widely distributed across the South Paleoisland and Île-de-la-Gonâve.

References

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A relatively blunt head and stout body allow *Uromacer catesbyi* (left) to consume large prey. The long snout, green color, and a longitudinal light line to disrupt the snake's shape allow *U. oxyrhynchus* (center) to blend effectively into its surroundings. Very slender *U. frenatus* (right) adopts a sit-and-wait foraging pose near the ground in order to prey on terrestrial lizards.