



# Newly Introduced Populations of the Saw-scaled Curlytail, *Leiocephalus carinatus* (Squamata: Leiocephalidae), in Eastern Artemisa Province, Cuba, with Observations on Prey

Luis F. de Armas

P.O. Box 4327, San Antonio de los Baños, Artemisa Province, 38100, Cuba (luisdearmas1945@gmail.com; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9096-3382)

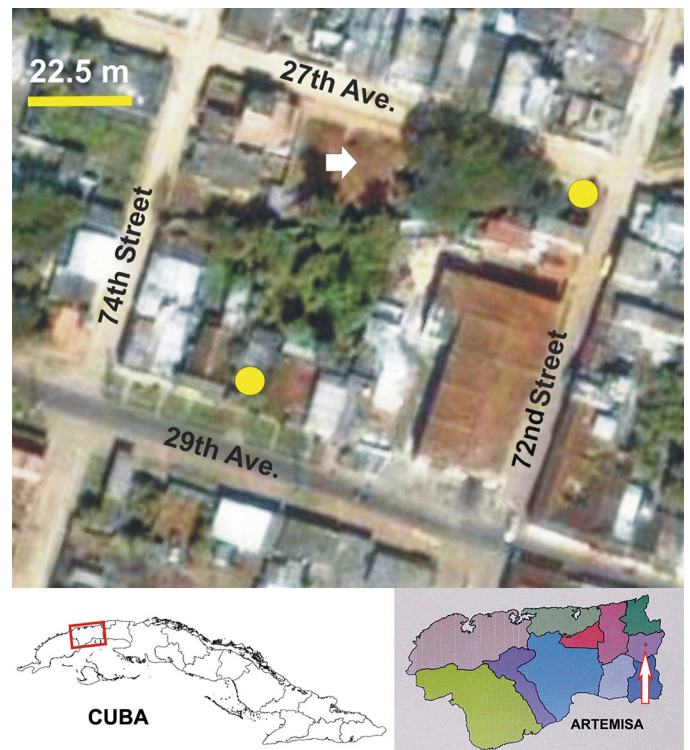
The Saw-scaled Curlytail, *Leiocephalus carinatus* Gray 1827, commonly known in Cuba as “perrito de costa,” is a polytypic species naturally distributed in the Bahamas, Cuba, and the Cayman Islands, and introduced in southern Florida (Schwartz and Henderson 1991; Henderson and Powell 2009). In the Cuban Archipelago, this species is represented by seven subspecies (Henderson and Powell 2009), among which *L. c. carinatus* is distributed in coastal areas of the western Cuban provinces of Pinar del Rio, Artemisa, La Habana, Mayabeque, and Matanzas (Rodríguez Schettino 2000).

In May 2018, a homeowner released three adult *L. carinatus carinatus* captured in the coastal area of Mariel, Artemisa Province, on a small parcel of land (Fig. 1) situated on 27th Avenue between 72nd and 74th Street, San Antonio de los Baños, Artemisa Province, Cuba (22.89347°N, 82.50978°W; 75 m asl and 30 km from the coast). Later, in August 2020, another homeowner released 15 adults collected in Varadero Beach, Matanzas Province, in his backyard on 29th Avenue.

On 1 September 2020, I observed two adult *L. c. carinatus* in a small hollow on the wall of a home at the intersection of 72nd Street and 27th Avenue (Fig. 2). According to the owner of that residence, the lizards live in her yard but also climb onto the flat roof of the house. On 7 August 2021, a domestic cat (*Felis catus*) killed one of the largest lizards, but on that date I observed at least six juveniles belonging to as many as three different generations (SVL ~25–50 mm).

Although reproducing, the small population of *L. c. carinatus* from 72nd Street at 27th Avenue remains largely restricted to that backyard but the population from 29th Avenue between 72nd and 74th Streets is not only reproducing but is expanding its range into nearby gardens and backyards.

The contiguous parcel of land (Fig. 1, white arrow) is natural habitat of at least six species of lizards (*Leiocephalus cubensis cubensis*, *Anolis sagrei*, *A. porcatus*, *Sphaerodactylus elegans*, *Hemidactylus mabouia*, and occasionally observed *Anolis equestris*) and at least four species of snakes (*Tropidophis pardalis*, *T. melanurus*, *Cubophis cantherigerus* and *Typhlops* sp.).



**Fig. 1.** Location of the introduced populations (yellow circles) of Saw-scaled Curlytails (*Leiocephalus c. carinatus*) in San Antonio de los Baños, Artemisa Province, Cuba. The white arrow indicates the parcel in which the three lizards from Mariel were released.



**Fig. 2.** Introduced populations of Saw-scaled Curlytails (*Leiocephalus c. carinatus*) in San Antonio de los Baños, Artemisa Province, Cuba: An adult in a hole of a wall (left) and three juveniles on a wall (center) at the intersection of 72nd Street and 27th Avenue, and an adult and a juvenile on the sidewalk of 29th Avenue between 72nd and 74th Street. Photographs by the author.

Between August and December 2021, I examined 46 fecal pellets of juvenile *L. carinatus* from the introduced populations. Twenty-five contained exclusively ants (Hymenoptera: Formicidae) of three species, but more than 90% were Big-headed Ants (*Pheidole megacephala*). Prey items in other pellets were isopods (*Porcellionides pruinosus* and unidentified species), small weevils (Curculionidae), darkling beetles (Tenebrionidae: *Alphitobius?*), indeterminate small beetles, American Cockroaches (*Periplaneta americana*), Western Honey Bees (*Apis mellifera*), unidentified wasps (Hymenoptera), ants, vegetal material, and remains of skin from moulting.

In 25 fecal pellets of adults collected from 1 August 2021 to 23 May 2022, I identified the following prey: roaches (*Blaberus cranifer*, *Pycnoscellus surinamensis*, *Periplaneta americana*), tenebrionid beetles (*Zophobas atrata*), Western Honey Bees (*Apis mellifera*), one parasitic wasp (Braconidae), indeterminate weevils (Curculionidae), indeterminate beetles, and very few ants (Figs. 1–4). According to a neighbor, they also ate the wet bread fed to chickens. Although I found no remains

of vertebrates in fecal pellets, at 0840 h on 25 May 2022, I observed an adult curlytail perched 80 cm above the ground on the trunk of a large Royal Poinciana (*Delonix regia*) capture and ingest a juvenile Cuban Brown Anole (*Anolis sagrei*).

The two small introduced populations are on the same block and separated by less than 60 m (Fig. 1) without any physical barriers and probably will merge in the near future.

#### Acknowledgements

I greatly appreciate the neighbors who provided information on these lizards. Julio A. Genaro (Toronto, Canada) identified the *Apis mellifera* and Braconidae (Hymenoptera).

#### Literature Cited

- Henderson, R.W. and R. Powell. 2009. *Natural History of West Indian Reptiles and Amphibians*. University Press of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA.
- Rodriguez Schettino, L. 2000. Cuban reptiles: Original citations, holotypes, and geographic ranges. *Smithsonian Herpetological Information Service* 125: 1–28.
- Schwartz, A. and R.W. Henderson. 1991. *Amphibians and Reptiles of the West Indies: Descriptions, Distributions, and Natural History*. University of Florida Press, Gainesville, Florida, USA.