



A Trinidad Coralsnake (*Micrurus circinalis*) Feeding on a Marbled Swamp Eel (*Synbranchus marmoratus*) in Trinidad, West Indies

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The island of Trinidad is the only island in the world where two species of coralsnakes, the Trinidad Coralsnake,

Micrurus circinalis (Duméril, Bibron and Duméril 1854), and the Trinidad Ribbon Coralsnake, *Micrurus diutius* Burger



Figure 1. A Trinidad Coralsnake (*Micrurus circinalis*) and a partially digested Marbled Swamp Eel (*Synbranchus marmoratus*) it had regurgitated (A & B); the regurgitated swamp eel (C); and superficial wounds on the coralsnake, presumably inflicted by an excavator engaged in road repairs and responsible for the snake's death (D). Photographs by Shaquille George (A–C) and Hukaymah Ali (D).

1955, occur in sympatry. Both species are known to feed on lizards and other snakes, with *M. circinalis* also known to feed on insect larvae and *M. diutius* on caecilians, amphibiaenians, and bony fishes (Silvia et al. 2017; Murphy et al. 2019). Because *M. diutius* is semi-aquatic (Jowers et al. 2019), that its diet includes amphibians and fish is not surprising, but the same cannot be said for *M. circinalis*.

Micrurus circinalis is a nocturnal, fossorial snake known to inhabit tropical lowland forests, wet to intermediate low montane forests, old secondary growth, savannas, agricultural areas, and urban habitats (Murphy et al. 2019). They spend most of their time in soil or burrows, under rocks, leaf litter, or fallen branches, tree trunks, and logs (Charles and Smith 2009). Herein we report for the first time *M. circinalis* preying on a fish, the Marbled Swamp Eel (*Synbranchus marmoratus*).

Synbranchus marmoratus Bloch 1795, commonly known as the Marbled Swamp Eel or Zangee (in Trinidad), ranges from southern Mexico to Argentina (Prestes-Carneiro and Béarez 2017), including Trinidad and Tobago (Mohammed et al.). This species inhabits stagnant freshwater, drains and channels, caves, and wet soil (Graham and Baird 1984; Prestes-Carneiro and Béarez 2017; Nico et al. 2019). Because it is a facultative air-breather, it is tolerant of hypoxic waters and can venture onto land in search of prey and new habitats (Graham and Baird 1984).

At 1458 h on 21 March 2023, we observed and documented an injured *M. circinalis* (total length ~390 mm) along an access road passing through a forested area with no observable nearby water source in Guayaguayare, Trinidad (10.162067, -61.028104). The snake, which later succumbed to its injuries, was injured during road repairs, probably by coming into contact with the excavator that was operating at the time. Noting its injuries, we secured and confined the snake in a snake bag, at which time it was still alive. At approximately 2000 h, we noticed a foul odor emanating from the bag. Upon opening the bag, we saw a partially

decomposed *S. marmoratus* (total length ~260 mm) that the snake had regurgitated (Fig. 1). We cannot say whether *S. marmoratus* is a common prey item of *M. circinalis* or whether this was an opportunistic event. Although *M. circinalis* is not known to be semiaquatic, given its fossorial habits, habitat overlap is certainly possible.

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