

Catalogue of American Amphibians and Reptiles.

Wilson, L.D., J.R. McCranie, and J.B. Slowinski. 1992. *Micrurus ruatanus*.

***Micrurus ruatanus* (Günther)
Babaspul (local dialect), Coral (Spanish),
Roatan Coral Snake (English)**

Elaps ruatanus Günther, 1895:185. Type-locality, "Honduras, Ruatan I. [Isla de Roatán, Islas de la Bahía]." Syntypes (8), British Museum Natural History (BMNH) 1946.1.21.16-22 (formerly 95.2.20.1-7) and Museum of Comparative Zoology (MCZ) 26930, 6 males and 2 females, collected by G.F. Gaumer, between December 1885 and March 1888 (five syntypes examined by LDW).

Elaps fulvius: Boulenger, 1896:422 (as variation E).

Micrurus fulvius ruatanus: Barbour, 1928:61.

Micrurus nigrocinctus ruatanus: Barbour and Loveridge, 1929:256.

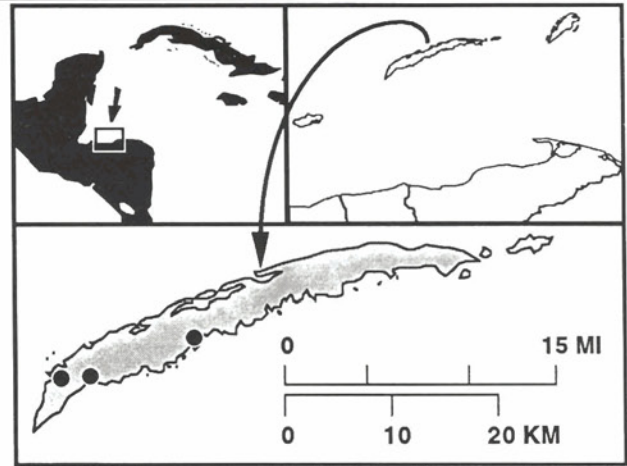
Micrurus ruatanus: Schmidt, 1933:34.

[*Micrurus*]. *ruatanus*: Bolaños, 1983:277. *Lapsus*.

• **Content.** No subspecies are recognized.

• **Definition.** *Micrurus ruatanus* has a bicolored black and red ringed pattern in which black rings of about three scales in length tend to alternate with shorter black rings $\frac{3}{4}$ -2 scales in length. Some specimens show this condition more clearly than do others, and the alternation usually is more evident posteriorly. The narrower black rings are frequently interrupted laterally, with the interrupted number ranging from 3-18. The number of black body rings ranges from 33-45 (\bar{x} = 38.4), with females averaging more than males (35-45, \bar{x} = 40.8; 33-39, \bar{x} = 35.5, respectively). The tip of the snout is uniformly black to a point just posterior to the prefrontal-frontal and prefrontal-supraocular sutures. The remainder of the head is dark red (constituting the parietal ring). The black nuchal ring begins 1-1 $\frac{1}{2}$ scales posterior to the parietals and is 3-5 middorsal scales long. The ventral scales range from 183-187 in males (\bar{x} = 185.7) and 193-204 in females (\bar{x} = 199.0). Subcaudals range from 46-47 in males (\bar{x} = 46.4) and 34-38 in females (\bar{x} = 37.0). Male *ruatanus* possess para-anal tubercles. Maximum known TL = 681 mm (a female). Tail length/TL ratio ranges from 0.142-0.158 in males and 0.098-0.117 in females. The karyotype consists of 26 chromosomes (2N=26); 16 are macrochromosomes and 10 are microchromosomes.

• **Diagnosis.** *Micrurus ruatanus* may be distinguished from all its congeners by the following combination of characters: bicol-



Map. Isla de Roatán, Islas de la Bahía, Honduras, showing the only three precise localities for *Micrurus ruatanus*. The type-locality is too imprecise to plot.

ored red and black ringed pattern; 33-45 black rings on body; black rings tend to be of two sizes which alternate with one another, this alternation is more evident on some specimens than on others and is more pronounced on the posterior portion of the body; the narrower black rings are frequently interrupted laterally, with the interrupted number ranging from 3-18; the wider black rings are equal in size or slightly wider dorsally than the red rings; 183-187 ventrals in males, 193-204 in females; 46-47 subcaudals in males, 34-38 in females; maximum known total length 681 mm.

• **Descriptions.** The most complete descriptions of the external morphology are in Campbell and Lamar (1989), Wilson (1984), Wilson and Hahn (1973), and Wilson and Meyer (1972, 1982, 1985). Boulenger (1896), Dunn (1940), Günther (1895), and Schmidt (1933) provided earlier descriptions (although with some variance in counts) based upon the syntype series. Luykx et al. (1992) described the karyotype of a recently collected specimen.

• **Illustrations.** Wilson and Hahn (1973) provided pen-and-ink drawings of a dorsal view of the head and anterior body, as well as the dorsal color pattern. Günther (1895) included pen-and-ink drawings showing the color pattern and the scalation of the dorsal surfaces of the head. Luykx et al. (1992) illustrated the karyotype.



Figure 1. An adult female *Micrurus ruatanus* (Univ. Miami RC 90-1). Photograph by J. Bridges.

• **Distribution.** *Micrurus ruatanus* is endemic to Isla de Roatán, the largest of the Bay Islands (Departamento Islas de la Bahía), situated off the north coast of and belonging to the country of Honduras. The only precise localities for *ruatanus* are Coxen Hole, Big Bay (based on CM 69364), and Sandy Bay at low elevations (near sea level). The first two localities are on the south side and the last on the north side of the island. The species probably ranges throughout Isla de Roatán; residents of Helene on the eastern tip of the island told JRM in November 1989 that the "babaspul" occurs there. The snake has been found under piles of coconut fronds and moving about in the open shortly after dawn.

Roze (1967), and In Peters and Orejas-Miranda, (1970) erroneously included the "adjacent mainland [of] Honduras" in the range of this species. This error was perpetrated in the checklists of Brown (1973), Harding and Welch (1980), and Hoge and Romano (1971).

• **Fossil Record.** None.

• **Pertinent Literature.** Most of the literature on this taxon deals with taxonomy and is listed under Descriptions. Wilson and Meyer (1972) discussed a Honduran mainland specimen of *Micrurus nigrocinctus* that Roze (1967) erroneously identified as *M. ruatanus*. Wilson and Hahn (1973) provided some habitat information. Campbell and Lamar (1989) and Villa et al. (1988) listed the majority of the pertinent literature on this species. Campbell and Lamar (1989), Cruz (1987), and Wilson and Meyer (1982, 1985) provided keys to distinguish *ruatanus* from the remaining species of Honduran coral snakes.

• **Etymology.** The name *ruatanus* is a latinization of the name of the island, Roatán, to which this snake is endemic.

• **Comment.** Some disagreement exists about the specific status of *ruatanus*. Roze (1983) considered *ruatanus* to be a subspecies of *Micrurus nigrocinctus* and has been followed by Golay (1985) and Smith (1987). Wilson (1984), Wilson and Hahn (1973), and Wilson and Meyer (1972, 1982, 1985) discussed reasons for considering *M. ruatanus* a valid species.

Bolaños (1983, 1984) inaccurately listed *ruatanus* as a tricolor species in a table on Central American coral snakes.

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