

Catalogue of American Amphibians and Reptiles.

A.J. Maley, A.Z. Savit, H.M. Heinz, R. Powell, and R.W. Henderson. 2006. *Alsophis rufiventris*.

***Alsophis rufiventris* (Duméril and Bibron 1854)**
Red-bellied Racer, Black Racer

Dromicus rufiventris Duméril and Bibron 1854:668.

Type-locality, "Brasil" (in error; see **Remarks**). Syntypes, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle (MNNH) 3559–3560, both adult males (SVL = 587 and 651, respectively), dates of collection and collectors unknown (not examined by authors).

Alsophis rufiventris: Garman 1887:282. First use of present combination.

Alsophis rufivebtris: Currat 1980:97. *Lapsus*.

• **CONTENT.** No subspecies are recognized.

• **DEFINITION.** *Alsophis rufiventris* is a moderately sized colubrid, with a maximum known SVL of 920 mm, although one individual observed but not collected at about 400 m elevation on The Quill, St. Eustatius, had a TL of approximately 1500 mm (E.J. Censky and RWH, pers. obs.). Dorsal scale rows usually number 23 at midbody, but occasionally 21. Ventral scales number 204–220 and subcaudals 94–122. Supralabials are 8/8, infralabials 10/10, preoculars 1/1 or 2/2, postoculars 2/2, and loreals 1/1. The cloacal scute is divided (Schwartz and Henderson 1991).

Dorsal ground color is beige, pale brown to dark brown, gray, taupe, and black and is generally darker posteriorly. Dark brown stripes run from the nasals through the eyes, across the postoculars to the anteriormost dorsals. The dorsal pattern is sexually dimorphic; in males, it consists of diffuse, black-bordered, brown blotches on the middle of the back, deteriorating into a diffuse, broad, dark middorsal stripe posteriorly; in females, a paramedian series of streaks and smudges becomes less obvious posteriorly. The venter is orange-beige, cream, or dirty yellow, suffused with dark brown that becomes heavier posteriorly, leaving the posterior ventrals completely dark brown or black.

• **DIAGNOSIS.** *Alsophis rufiventris* can be distinguished from all Lesser Antillean congeners (Schwartz and Henderson 1985), except occasionally from *A. rijgersmaei*, by having 23 (only occasionally 21) rows of midbody scales. The species differs from *A. rijgersmaei*, which has 21 midbody scale rows, by a greater number of ventrals (209–218 in males versus 202–208 in *A. rijgersmaei* and 211–218 in females vs. 200–206 in *A. rijgersmaei*) and subcaudals (116–120 in males versus 112–117 in *A. rijgersmaei* and 97–122 in females versus 94–102 in *A. rijgersmaei*).

• **DESCRIPTIONS.** Detailed descriptions of the species, other than the original of Duméril and Bibron (1854), are in Boulenger (1894), Brongersma (1959), Schwartz and Henderson (1991), and Powell et al.



Figure 1. Adult *Alsophis rufiventris* from Saba (top) and St. Eustatius (below) (photographs by John S. Parmerlee, Jr.).



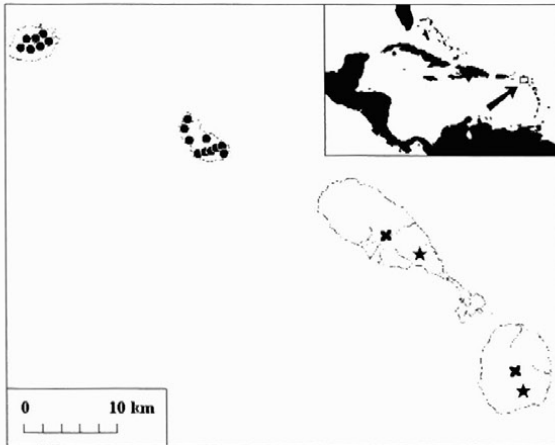
(2005). Malhotra and Thorpe (1999) and Sajdak (2004) included brief descriptions.

• **ILLUSTRATIONS.** Color photographs are in Heinz et al. (2004), Malhotra and Thorpe (1999), Powell and Henderson (2005, inside front cover), Powell et al. (2005), Rojer (1997a), and Sajdak (2004). Black-and-white photographs are in Henderson and Sajdak (1986), Maley (2004), Powell and Henderson (2005), and Sajdak and Henderson (1991). Brongersma (1959) included a diagram of the hemipenis and Maglio (1970) a line drawing of a nasal bone.

• **DISTRIBUTION.** *Alsophis rufiventris* is endemic to the Saba and St. Christopher (St. Kitts) banks, where it is found in a variety of natural and altered habitats ranging from dry thorn forest to moderately mesic hillsides. The species is thriving on Saba and St. Eustatius, where it is common even in close proximity to human activity and habitation (Henderson 2004), but appears to be extirpated on St. Kitts and Nevis (Barbour 1930a, Henderson 1992, 2004, Powell et al. 2005, Sajdak and Henderson 1991, and Sajdak 2004). The range was illustrated previously in Schwartz and Henderson (1991). Fowler (1918) erroneously listed *A. rufiventris* from the Virgin Islands.

In 2004, a waif was collected on St. Maarten and donated to the zoo (Powell et al. 2005, in which the individual is illustrated). No evidence suggests the presence of a breeding population on that island.

• **FOSSIL RECORD.** van der Klift (1992) and Wing and Scudder (1980) found remains of "*Alsophis cf. rufiventris*" in archaeological sites on St. Kitts, and Nokkert (2002) recorded material in an archaeological



Map. The distribution of *Alsophis rufiventris*. Dots indicate locality records, Xs mark extirpated populations on St. Christopher (= Kitts) and Nevis, and the stars mark fossil localities (modified from Schwartz and Henderson 1991). The type-locality is in error and is not indicated. Some dots indicate several geographically proximate localities.

site on Nevis.

• **PERTINENT LITERATURE.** Powell et al. (2005) provided a description and an overview of distribution, natural history, and conservation status. Barbour (1923) commented on the abundance of this species on St. Eustatius. Parker (1936) compared scale counts of *A. rufiventris* to other species of *Alsophis*. Maglio (1970), Crother and Hillis (1995), and Crother (1999a,b) discussed phylogeny. Henderson and Crother (1989) and Henderson and Sajdak (1996) examined prey. Sajdak and Henderson (1991), Daltry et al. (1997), Henderson (2004), and Powell and Henderson (2005) addressed conservation (see also **Remarks**). Schwartz and Henderson (1991), Rojer (1997a,b), Malhotra and Thorpe (1999), and Maley (2004) provided general information on natural history. Heinz et al. (2004) discussed activity, Heinz et al. (2005) recorded foraging and diet, and Savit et al. (2005) addressed abundance in different habitats at different elevations on The Quill, St. Eustatius.

The species also has been included in general works, guides, notes, checklists, and keys by Barbour (1914, 1930b, 1935, 1937), Boulenger (1894), Censky and Kaiser (1998), Cochran (1938), Day (1996), Frank and Ramus (1995), Garman (1887), Krueyhoff (1938), MacLean et al. (1977), Maglio (1970), Malhotra and Thorpe (1999), Powell et al. (1996), Roughgarden (1990), Schwartz and Henderson (1985, 1988), Schwartz and Thomas (1975), Sokolov (1988), Underwood (1962), van Ditzhuijzen (2004), Werner (1929), and Westermann (1953).

• **REMARKS.** The syntype (MNHN 3559), with "Brasil" as the obviously erroneous type locality, was acquired through the Museum of Leyden; the other syntype (MNHN 3560) apparently was purchased by Bibron in London (I. Ineich, in litt., 10.VIII.2004).

Alsophis rufiventris is listed as "endangered" on the

IUCN Red List (IUCN 2003).

Garman (1887) and Brongersma (1959) reported high frequencies of broken tails among *Alsophis rufiventris*.

• **ETYMOLOGY.** The specific epithet *rufiventris* is from the Latin *rufus* (= red) and *venter* (= belly).

• **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.** Ivan Ineich, Curator of Reptiles, MNHN, examined the syntypes at our request.

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