

Dec 29 2008 Mt. Hillaby snake follow-up

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Dear Editor,

I did not intend on commenting publicly on the latest snake discovery and death in Barbados, but my phone line became so 'hot' with incoming calls since the Nation article of 29-12-2008 that I am surprised it has not melted yet. Personally I think my OAS and UN work for Indigenous Rights is more important and newsworthy, but that is just me.

I would just like to point out that it was I some years ago - who said that "There are possibly up to 10 escaped/released illegally imported pets that I was aware of that may or may not still be at large in Barbados", the capture of the first one (an 11 foot long Burmese python - *Python molurus molurus*) by Inspector Wayne Norville of the RSPCA was not publicized (this occurred unbeknown to myself prior to my '10 snake' estimate statement), and I subsequently did my own 'investigation' and found out that the 3 Boa constrictors that were cut to pieces long before in cane fields before my estimate - were escapees from 3 different persons I had factored in to my 10 estimate. More recently one 6 foot escapee Boa constrictor (from a facility that does not admit to this truth) was captured in St. Andrew 2 hills away from where it was last spotted and I had last searched in vain for it (and it was well covered by the Nation Newspaper). Most recently - a 4 foot Boid was killed in the Mt. Hillaby area. So this accounts for 6 of the 10. At the time I had made the statement - people in high positions in this country preferred to disbelieve me and were of the opinion that there were NO such large snakes 'on the loose' and the public was either concocting tales or imaging the sightings. More recently a well known Radio personality was having a grand old time making fun of our efforts and asking where all the snakes have disappeared to in the last 2 years since there had been no further incidents.

To these people I will say again - there are at least 4 more I suspect to already be out there, and from time to time, here and there, now and then - one by one (to make it as simple and concise as I can) the other 4 will be discovered; in the days, weeks, months and years to come. In the interim - I can only advise the public that NONE of them are poisonous as they are all Boids (Boas and Pythons) and 3 of the 4 are too small in size to pose a threat to human beings, the only folks who should be cautious and not allow their children to venture into gully areas to explore and play are the good people of the Mt. Hillaby area - many of whom saw with their own eyes the 16 foot Burmese Python that a guy called 'Otis' had as a 'pet' and released in their area (VERY IRRESPONSIBLY) some years ago. It might be long dead (though I am not aware of a carcass ever having been found), if still alive it could be feeding infrequently by night on the Barbados Green monkeys (as the monkeys sleep blissfully unaware) that are common in the surrounding gullies that contain water all year round, it would need to feed only 6-8 times per year on an adult monkey to survive; residents of Mt. Hillaby said fowls have disappeared and a large piece of shed skin was found by a nearby Plantation owner, I recall being told via a phone call about this shed skin also but saw the gentleman who said he was bringing it for me. Mr. Romeo Yarde (Caribbean Herpetological Society member) was good enough to venture to meet with the Mt. Hillaby folk and spent 2 hours answering their many queries and concerns (up to that point they told him no-one came to answer any of their questions and they were relieved that Mr. Yarde had come), he met with a fellow who's nickname was 'Smurf', this fellow was the one who killed the 4 foot snake with a Hoe, residents told Mr. Yarde about 'Otis' and his large pet python (the one that many armchair critics here who know nothing at all are fond of saying 'never existed'), he saw where the residents had burned the carcass of the 4 foot snake to oblivion - thereby rendering positive ID impossible, though from the Nation photo side profile of the specimen looks to be a Guyana Rainbow Boa (*Epicrates cenchria maurus*) - but until I see a top view photograph I cannot be 100% certain about the species.

Again, no-one wishes Barbadians to be any more 'snake-phobic' than they are already, but neither do I nor any Caribbean Herpetological Society member wish to see a child harmed by the ONE specimen that has the potential to do this (if it is still alive), that is why I urge the Mt. Hillaby residents to exercise caution in remote areas, and DO NOT allow your children to venture into the gullies that surround you without an adult - and certainly not at night. I am preparing to do day and night searches of the gullies surrounding Mt. Hillaby, but this will depend on me securing many volunteers from within the Caribbean Herpetological Society membership (anyone interested in joining can freely do so at www.corriebusinessgroup.com/PetDepot/hs/) because from Mr. Yarde's report there is a LOT of ground to cover, our goal would be to look for signs of the presence of a large Boid, tracks, scat, sleeping areas, shed skin etc. If fortune smiles on us we will find it (or remains thereof) and relieve the stress and fear that many Mt. Hillaby residents endure.

Yours sincerely,

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Founder/President
Caribbean Herpetological Society