



AN IGUANID LIZARD SHAMMING A HOUSE GECKO

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THIS is a report of a free-living diurnal iguanid lizard, *Tropidurus plica* (Linnaeus), basking in artificial light at night, indoors. This Neotropical species was widely known as *Plica plica* until Frost (1992), following an extensive study of the

group, included the species of *Plica* in the genus *Tropidurus*. Frank & Ramus (1995) list the vernacular name 'tree runner', which sounds strange for a lizard known for its 'sit and wait' foraging strategy (Hoogmoed, 1973; Vitt, 1991;

see Werner, 1996, for comments on vernacular names). Murphy (1997) quotes the local names 'tok-tok' and 'old man' with reservation.

During 21 May - 3 June and 6 -13 June 2000 we stayed on Trinidad (Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies), in the Pax Guest House on Mt. St. Benedict, Tunapuna (10° 39' 38.6" N, 61° 23' 49.8" W, 160 m a.s.l.). We lodged in a small cottage annexed to the main building, which had a corridor bounded towards the outside by a wall of natural stones. This wall was only 2 m high, not reaching the ceiling, so that above it the corridor communicated with the outside. In the corridor stood a chest of drawers carrying a large mirror. A couple of incandescent lamps lit the corridor at night.

Every night, an adult *Tropidurus plica* would emerge from behind the mirror and hang spread-eagled on the wall beside it, usually vertically with the head down but tilted up, away from the wall (Hoogmoed, 1973). The lizard was missing part of the tail, and its coloration lacked the usual green component; its dominant colours were grey and black. The identification of the species was confirmed by Dr. Victor Quesnel, an experienced and renowned local naturalist and herpetologist, when he came to visit on 29 May 2000.

The lizard was out almost every night throughout the whole night, but was extremely wary and on the appearance of people a few meters away would quickly dodge behind the mirror. It would stay under cover for a variable duration, and then sometimes emerge with only the front half of the body exposed. Although our room had a window, with semi-transparent curtains, towards the corridor, it was very difficult to photograph the lizard because it tended to escape even from the camera's approach behind the window.

Times when we actually recorded the lizard's presence included two attempts at photography, on 31 May at 05:00 h and on 9 June at 00:30 h, and a series of inspections in the night 12/13 June at 22:30, 00:30, 01:30, 05:00 and 06:40 h. At 00:30 and 05:00 h air temperature and wall temperature ranged from 25 to 25.6° C (Miller-Weber small animal thermometer). Light intensity on the wall

section frequented by the lizard at night approximated 3000 lux (Gossen Lunasix-F photographic exposure meter graded in lux). We did not actually verify the lizard's whereabouts during the day but believe that it stayed behind the piece of furniture.

Tropidurus plica ranges widely in northern, especially Amazonian, South America and on Trinidad, living in forests, mainly on the trunks of large trees but also on rocks (Avila-Pires, 1995; Murphy, 1997). We saw an individual on a rock in the forest on Mt. St. Benedict, appearing awake at about 14:00 h. Hoogmoed (1973) described the species as diurnal with 'sit and wait' foraging habits. Vitt (1991), based on eight months of observations (wet and dry seasons) in Brazil, details the diel cycle of *T. plica* as diurnal. At night he observed four individuals sleeping, two hanging on tree trunks and two in rock crevices. He recorded the average body temperature of three day-active individuals as 30.7° C, while the accompanying air and substrate temperatures averaged 27.4 and 27.7° C respectively.

This case of reversed diel cycle in a *Tropidurus plica* is certainly unusual and one must wonder whether we have encountered a single freak animal, or a rare example of an existing pattern. Only after this latter alternative is validated will it be warranted to expound the assorted implications.

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