

Oxybelis aeneus (Wagler): an addition to the herpetofauna of Turneffe Atoll, Belize

STEVEN G. PLATT¹, JAN C. MEERMAN², THOMAS R. RAINWATER³,
and ADAM G. FINGER³

¹*Department of Math and Science, Oglala Lakota College, 490 Piya Wiconi Road,
Kyle, South Dakota, 57752, USA*

Email: splatt@gwtc.net [author for correspondence]

²*Green Hills Butterfly Ranch and Botanical Collections, P. O. Box 208,
Belmopan, Belize*

³*The Institute of Environmental and Human Health, Texas Tech University,
Box 41163, Lubbock, Texas, 79409-1163, USA*

TURNEFFE Atoll is the largest of three atolls in Belize, and one of only four atolls in the Western Hemisphere (Stoddart, 1962). Turneffe Atoll is located approximately 35 km from the mainland and consists of a chain of islands partially enclosing a shallow lagoon (Figure 1). The topography, climate, and vegetation of the atoll are fully described by Stoddart (1962, 1963). Recent biodiversity surveys of the Turneffe Atoll documented a herpetofauna consisting of one species of anuran, one species of crocodylian, four species of turtles, five species of lizards, and two species of snakes (Platt et al., 1999a, 1999b; Platt & Thorbjarnarson, 2000). However, Platt et al. (1999b) emphasize that the atoll herpetofauna remains incompletely known and further collecting will likely yield additional records, particularly of cryptic and less common forms such as snakes. We here report the addition of the Neotropical vine snake [*Oxybelis aeneus* (Wagler)] to the herpetofauna of Turneffe Atoll.

Three *O. aeneus* were encountered on Blackbird Cay, Turneffe Atoll during June and July 2002. On 3rd July 2002 we collected an adult *O. aeneus* (total length = 1438 mm; snout-vent length = 860 mm) among ground debris in second-growth littoral forest, approximately 0.25 km north of Blackbird Cay Dive Resort (17° 18.92' N; 87° 47.98' W). This specimen was deposited in the vertebrate collection of the Campbell Museum, Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina, USA (CUSC 2123). The snake was found as it consumed an adult anole (*Anolis* sp.; probably *A.*

sagrei). Other studies indicate lizards, particularly anoles, are important prey for *O. aeneus* (Keiser, 1967; Henderson, 1982; Wilson & Cruz Díaz, 1993; Lee, 1996). Additional sightings of single *O. aeneus* were made on 11 June and 9 July 2002 in dense grass and scrub along a beach ridge approximately 4 km north of Blackbird Cay Dive Resort (17° 22.41' N; 87° 48.78' W). Our data constitute the first report of *O. aeneus* from any offshore island or atoll in Belize (Lee, 1996; Stafford & Meyer, 2000), and confirm the presence of a third species of snake on Turneffe Atoll.

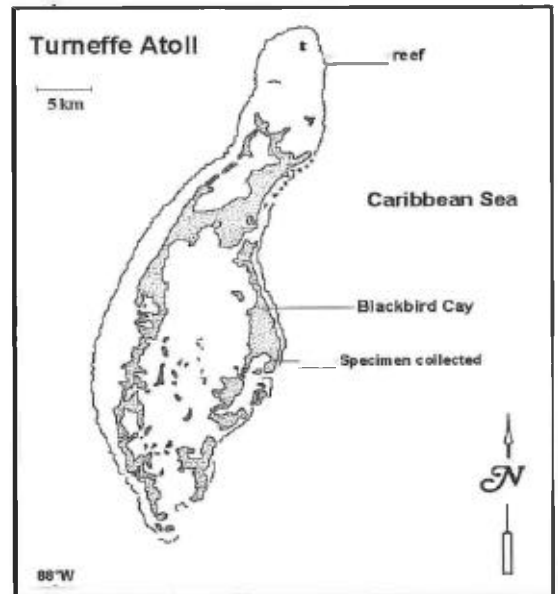


Figure 1.

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