

MICRURUS STEWARTI (Panamanian Coral Snake). **COLOR VARIATION.** Color patterns in snakes of the genus *Micrurus* are relevant for comprehending coral snake mimicry systems (e.g., Greene and McDiarmid 1981. *Science* 213:1207–1212), and for an adequate identification of these potentially harmful snakes.

On 23 January 2002, at night, FAS and RID found an adult male *M. stewarti* (619 mm TL, 531 SVL) active on the ground along the margins of a stream at Quebrada Peñalosa, Cuatro Callitas, Distrito de Donoso, Provincia de Colón (ca. 8°58'0.86"N, 80°33'9.16"W, 40 m elev.), within a stream reach flowing through a mixture of forest and humanly disturbed areas. The snake was essentially bicolored black and white, having a white head with a black snout, a rather long black nuchal ring, and a series of alternating white and black rings throughout the body and tail. The black rings were more than twice the length of the white rings. The white rings have a very faint pinkish tint, somewhat more noticeable on the head and first two body rings, and dorsally with black tipped scales. The specimen was collected and tagged, Círculo Herpetológico de Panamá (CH 5348), and later deposited in the Museo de Vertebrados de la Universidad de Panamá (MVUP 1797).

M. stewarti is a poorly known, rare species (Roze 1996. *Coral Snakes of the Americas*, Krieger Publishing Co., Malabar, Florida). No specimens of this species were known to have the exclusively black and white coloration reported herein, being previously regarded as a bicolor snake with black and red rings (Campbell and Lamar 1986. *The Venomous Reptiles of Latin America*, Comstock Publishing Associates, Ithaca, New York; Roze 1996, *op. cit.*). In addition, we have observed 8 live specimens of *M. stewarti* from other localities in central Panamá, all of them having

black and bright red rings. Therefore, in this species, the black and white ringed color variant is present in a low frequency.

In central Panamá, two other species of bicolored coral snakes occur in sympatry with *M. stewarti*: *M. multifasciatus*, also with black and red rings, and *M. mipartitus* with black and white body rings, the white color replaced by orange red on the head and tail (Campbell and Lamar 1986, *op. cit.*; Roze 1996, *op. cit.*; pers. obs.). Hence, the black and white ringed color variation, observed in *M. stewarti*, conforms to the geographic concordance in color pattern expected among presumed coral snake models as Müllerian mimics.

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