

The New Guinea Ground Boa

Check out the New Guinea ground boa.

By Mark O'Shea

Distribution: Eastern Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Bismarck Archipelago.

Habitat: Coconut plantations and rainforests.

Diet: Lizards, small mammals and frogs.

Max.length: 0.8-0.9m SVL (0.9-1.0m TL).

Reproductive strategy: Viviparous with 17-20 neonates.

The commonest snake inhabiting coconut husk piles on Karkar Island is the New Guinea ground boa, a sedentary, stout-bodied snake, which is called 'sleepy snake' in PNG and 'viper boa' in the reptile trade. This is the westernmost and probably the most advanced of the Pacific boas which evolved in Samoa-Fiji region and radiated westwards as far as the Moluccan islands of eastern Indonesia. Although inoffensive and inclined to adopt a 'balling' position when disturbed, the occasional large ground boa will strike and deliver a painful bite. It was easy to differentiate between males and females on Karkar Island because females lack cloacal spurs although this characteristic is not necessarily uniform across the range of the species.

Taxonomic note: Two subspecies may be recognized as follows.

Bismarck ground boa (*C.aspera aspera*) from New Britain and New Ireland, and New Guinea ground boa (*C.aspera schmidtii*) from New Guinea (West Papua and Papua New Guinea) and its continental islands including Karkar. The scale counts defining the two subspecies are listed in the table below.

In addition, a single New Ireland juvenile compared with several juvenile Karkar Island specimens, was found to be of more slender build, have a longer tail, a raised vertebral ridge and lighter coloured eyes but all those characters are relative and the sample was small.

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