

Chapter 9

A rapid assessment of the amphibians and reptiles of the Kwamalasamutu region (Kutari/lower Sipaliwini Rivers), Suriname

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SUMMARY

The RAP team recorded 42 species of amphibians and 36 species of reptiles, including one species of frog in the genus *Hypsiboas* that is new to science. The amphibian community was most similar to those of forests on bauxite plateaus in western Suriname. Some rare species were collected, of which the tree frog *Osteocephalus cabrerai* and the amphisbaenian *Amphisbaena slevini* were collected from Suriname for the first time. We also encountered *Chelonoides denticulata* (Yellow-footed Tortoise), listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List. Apart from caimans, most of the herpetofauna of the area seems to be minimally impacted by human activities such as hunting and fishing from the community of Kwamalasamutu. We discovered that certain expected species that are quite common in other areas in Suriname were either not found or found in very moderate numbers on the RAP survey. On the other hand, we found certain generally rare species to be quite common, emphasizing the importance of the region's forests to the biodiversity of Suriname and the Guiana Shield. Recommended conservation measures include avoiding large-scale deforestation in the region, and controlling the hunting of caimans.

INTRODUCTION

Amphibians are very important indicators of disturbance, because they are sensitive to changes in microclimate, and worldwide many species recently became extinct as the result of several impacts, including habitat change, pollution and disease. The group is well suited for rapid assessments, as the species are often easy to sample and their calls are diagnostic, which aids identification of species that cannot be collected, such as tree frogs in the rainforest canopy. Of the reptiles, lizards are often sensitive to changes in microhabitat. Many species are restricted to pristine forest habitats, and tend to disappear from regions of highly degraded forest. Caimans, turtles, and tortoises are generally good indicators of hunting pressure.

Although two previous expeditions by the National Zoological Collection / Anton de Kom University of Suriname visited southern Suriname in 1988 and 1989, these expeditions focused on the Sipaliwini Savanna and the Apalagadi area north of the savanna, and did not survey any areas in the vicinity of Kwamalasamutu. The Kutari River has never been visited by a biological expedition before. The goal of this survey was to provide baseline information on the diversity and abundance of reptiles and amphibians in the forests of the Kwamalasamutu region.