



KULEPBLA (brown tree snake) *Boiga irregularis*

Introduced Species

The kulepbla, as the brown tree snake is called in Chamorro, is an introduced species which probably arrived on Guam hidden in ship cargo. It is often mistakenly called the Philippine rat snake, but scientists have determined this reptile is the brown tree snake and does not even exist in the Philippines. It is native to Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Northern Australia.

The kulepbla deposits up to 12 leathery-shelled eggs in caves, hollow trees, or other places where they are protected from drying and overheating. The eggs hatch after an incubation period of about 90 days. The young kulepbla are about 15 inches (38 cm) long when they hatch, but may reach lengths of three feet (90 cm) in about a year. They are about four to five feet (1.2 to 1.5 m) long when they first reproduce and can grow to as long as 10 feet (3 m). The kulepbla is one of only two snakes found on Guam. The other is the ulo' attelong or blind snake. The kulepbla lives mainly in trees and is nocturnal, which means it is most active at night. It is sometimes found in or around homes, commercial buildings and other urban areas in search of food and hiding spots.

These snakes feed on birds, eggs, lizards, rats, mice and other small mammals. They are the cause of the decline of Guam's native forest bird population. They also prey on baby fanihi (Mariana fruit bats), thus contributing to the overall decline of the bat population. Like most reptiles, the kulepbla can go for long periods without food.

The kulepbla is poisonous. Several babies on Guam have nearly died after being bitten by it. This is why parents are advised to keep kulepbla away from infants and small children. They are also constrictors, which means they kill their prey by wrapping themselves around their prey and then squeezing. They also kill their prey by holding on to it and chewing, thus allowing the poison to slowly leak into the victim. The kulepbla will strike and bite if cornered, but people generally have little reason to fear them.

This animal is not native to Guam, therefore, it has no legitimate place on our island. The Department of Agriculture's Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources encourages the public to destroy all kulepbla or take them live and turn them in to the DAWR for scientific study. Research is ongoing to develop a method to control or eradicate the kulepbla on Guam.