

Endangered Puerto Rican Boa Snake and Rosewood Bush reside on Fort Buchanan

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Get to know two Federally listed species, the Puerto Rican Boa (*E. inornatus*) and the Rosewood bush, or Palo de Rosa (*O. rhodoxylon*). Both species are currently listed as endangered, and they inhabit within our installation in protected habitats. These protected habitats are located on the limestone hills north of the golf course, and in forested areas along the southern boundary of the post. These areas have been designated off-limits. Additional information that will help identify these species is found in attached files.

Do not attempt to handle the Puerto Rican Boa. You may be incurring in state and Federal violations subject to fines and penalties as you may harm this protected species.

The Puerto Rican Boa is absolutely harmless and it is unlikely that it will migrate to the developed areas of the Installation. Like all other snake species found in Puerto Rico, this boa is not poisonous. Boas are beneficial to our ecosystem as they help to keep the rat populations under control.

In the event you see a Puerto Rican Boa, you are required to notify it immediately to the Environmental Office during working hours, or to the PMO, Fire Department, or Veterinary Clinic after hours.

The Palo de Rosa or ((*Ottoschulzia rhodoxylon*) has been endangered since Apr. 1990. It is a small evergreen tree that 12 to 15 feet (4 to 5 meters) in height. Its distinctively reddish heartwood is suitable for turnery articles. Tree leaves are alternate and smooth with an elliptic to ovate shape. At their apex, these leaves are rounded or blunt, and at their base, they are entire, thick, and leathery. Palo de Rosa flowers are bisexual and are arranged singly or in clusters at the leaf bases. The flowers' corolla is tubular and

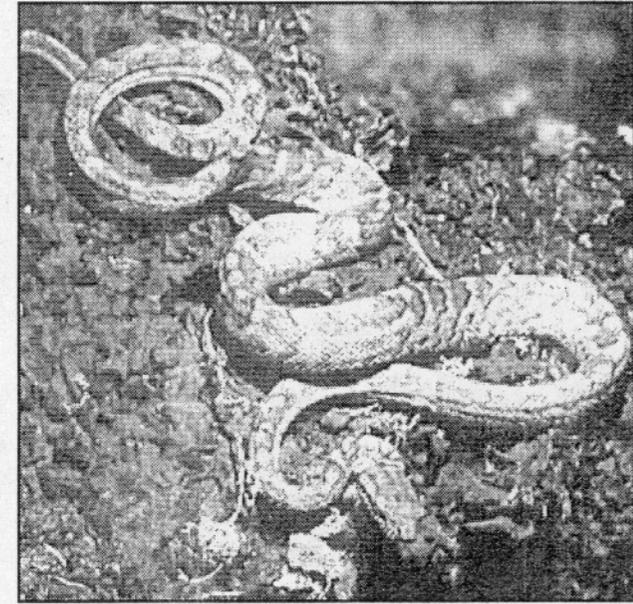
has five lobes (Department of the Interior 1990; Little et al., 1974). The fruit is a drupe with a thin covering. Flowers and fruit seem to be produced irregularly. As yet, no seedlings have been observed.

Only nine individuals are known to exist in Puerto Rico, and the species is also rare in the Dominican Republic (Department of the Interior 1990; Little et al., 1974.). In Puerto Rico, the species survives in three locations. One site is located in the north coast limestone Hills of Bayamon, and several sites are found within the dry limestone Guanica Commonwealth Forest on the south coast. A single individual has been reported in the Maricao Commonwealth Forest.

Different types of habitat exist at each of the three locations. The north coast, Bayamon site is situated in a semi-evergreen, seasonal forest at an elevation of 325 feet or 100 meters. In the southwestern coast Guanica Forest, the species occurs in a low elevation, semi-deciduous, dry forest on limestone. One tree in this population is located alongside a dry stream bed which carries water only during torrential rains. The individual in the Maricao Forest survives in a lower montane, semi-evergreen forest on serpentine outcrops. This location is at an elevation of about 1,960 feet or 600 meters.

Always rare, this species is further endangered by deforestation for industrialization and residential development. The Bayamon population is west of San Juan, a rapidly developing urban area. In addition, many of Puerto Rico's remaining forests, including all Palo de Rosa sites, are second-growth.

The surviving individuals in the Guanica Forest are in danger because they are located near dry stream beds and roadsides which could potentially be altered by forest management practices or flash floods. Palo de Rosa also flowers and fruits irregularly, and seedlings have never been observed. Puerto Rican Boa or (*Epicrates inornatus*) has an unusual color that varies but usually ranges



(courtesy photo)

from pale to dark brown, sometimes grayish, with 70 to 80 darker colored blotches along the back from neck to vent. These dorsal blotches are generally dark-bordered with the centers of a lighter hue. Maximum size is approximately 6 and a half feet.

Observations of captive specimens suggest that under natural conditions the diet of sub-adults and adults consists of birds, small mammals, and lizards. The boa feeds by seizing the prey in its jaws, wrapping several coils around the victim, and then constricting until the prey has suffocated. The prey is then swallowed head first. The feeding habits of the very young are unknown.

This species exists only in Puerto Rico. Although no population estimates are available, a series of casual observations were made during the period of 1972 to 1977. Pérez-Rivera and Vélez, Jr. (1978) observed 75 boas at 18 different localities. A considerable area judged to be potential habitat was not covered by their observations. (Information courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division Of Endangered Species Account)