

In dangerous places around the world, where soldiers or police officers may be committing human rights abuses, a mobile phone clip has become a key weapon. In the hands of campaigners and victims of abuse, it can provide valuable video evidence of crimes.

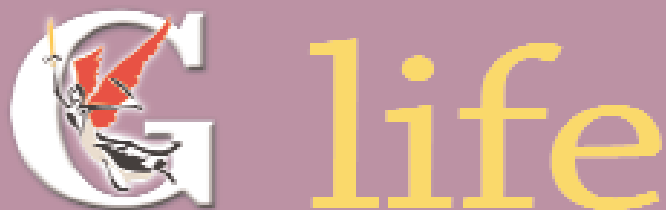
EyeWitness app lets smartphones report war crimes

The trouble is that often these clips are not what they seem—witness the video of a heroic Syrian boy apparently saving his sister in the middle of a fire fight. That turned out to be a fake. And even when the videos are genuine they

are often not admissible as evidence because their authenticity cannot be verified to the satisfaction of a court. This is where a new app which is going live on the Google Play store today could make all the difference. It is

called EyeWitness to Atrocities and is the result of a collaboration between the International Bar Association and the legal services division of the information firm LexisNexis. EyeWitness is designed to

record photos, videos and audio recordings in a simple and secure way. It looks like any photography app, but when you open it up, it has a secure mode which means that if your phone is examined by a security official they will not see any of the material you have recorded. (BBC)



• Twitter: @GuardianTT • Web: guardian.co.tt

Tale of two snake lovers

BOOK REVIEW

MIKE G RUTHERFORD

The obsession that a few people have for snakes is hard for many others to understand. It is even harder to grasp when that obsession is for venomous snakes. However, there are those out there who have dedicated their lives to learning more about these feared animals.

If one person could be described as a champion of snakes it would most likely be Raymond Ditmars—American herpetologist, zoo curator, filmmaker and author.

It is no wonder that he was chosen by British author and naturalist Dan Eatherly as the subject of his upcoming book *Bushmaster: Raymond Ditmars and the Hunt for the World's Largest Viper*, which was published on June 2.

The book takes the reader on two parallel narratives; one tells the story of Raymond Ditmars from his early years through his fascinating career to his “retirement” and the other is a travelogue of the author as he searches for information about his subject and tries to emulate Ditmars by visiting his past haunts.

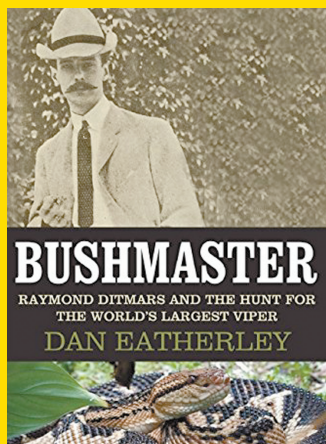
The story of Ditmars is fascinating if you have any interest in nature, zoos, snakes, wildlife documentaries, education or even meteorology. During his career he was interested and active in all these areas.

He was a pioneer in many different ways, doing things that are thought of as fairly commonplace today but were all new in his time.

His chief passion in life was reptiles and in particular snakes, he wanted to share this love with the wider world and try and educate people that serpents were a fascinating and valuable part of nature.

He lectured far and wide and was quick to take advantage of technological innovations such as magic lanterns and the early movie cameras and gramophones.

He undertook educational outreach before the term had even been coined and he worked tirelessly to promote the Bronx Zoo where he



Bushmaster: Raymond Ditmars and the Hunt for the World's Largest Viper
Hardcover: 304 pages
Publisher: Arcade Publishing
(June 2, 2015)
ISBN-10: 1628725117
ISBN-13: 978-1628725117

worked. Throughout the book there are mentions of Trinidad as the source of many of Ditmars snakes, the opening pages relate the nail biting story of the first time the teenage Ditmars came face to face with a bushmaster.

In 1896 he had been shipped a box of snakes from Trinidad. After three months cooped up in hessian bags, the snakes were not particularly happy.

While his parents were relaxing downstairs he was on the top floor of their New York house opening the box and trying to put the snakes into individual enclosures in his specially constructed snake room.

When he attempted to get the bushmaster out of its bag it managed to evade him and drop to the floor, as the author writes:

“He would never forget the turmoil of impressions etched on his brain in that instant: the snake’s length far exceeding that suggested by its weight; the keeled scales lending the skin a rasp-like quality; the waxy sheen of the animal; the blunt head; and set above pinkish jowls, the reddish-brown eyes with their

elliptical black pupils.

In the moments these features take to register, the front half of the reptile’s body rises to form a huge ‘S’ while the glistening pink tongue forks at the air. Then the snake advances.”

To find out what happened next you’ll need to buy the book.

The final few chapters are focused on Ditmars’ trip to Trinidad in 1934 alongside the author’s visit in summer 2012 and they provide a lovely comparison of the past and present. Ditmars and his family arrived on a steamship whilst the author flew in by commercial airliner.

Ditmars visited the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture in St Augustine to talk with local experts and scientists and 80 years later the author came to the same site, now the University of the West Indies campus, to meet new experts.

As curator of the Zoology Museum on the campus, I was paid a visit by the author to look at snake specimens, unfortunately at that time the museum had no bushmasters to show him. Since then however we have acquired three full grown adults, one juvenile and a head.

I have yet to encounter a live bushmaster in the wild despite spending many days each year walking in the forests.

The closest I have come to experiencing the excitement of seeing one was during the first ever Trinidad Bioblitz, which took place in November 2012 in Tucker Valley.

A large adult bushmaster, or mapepire zanana as it more commonly known locally, was brought to the basecamp by some of the birdwatching team.

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Unfortunately it had been found dead on the road up to Morne Catherine but even in death it had the power to draw attention.

We put it on display in the tent for the rest of the event and the public were equally repulsed and attracted.

Reading Dan’s book made me think again of this mixture of fear and curiosity that snakes engender in people and how an amazing creature such as the bushmaster deserves proper understanding of its place in the world and this book certainly helps to spread that message.

• Mike G Rutherford is a Zoology Curator, Dept of Life Sciences at UWI, St Augustine.

MORE INFO

If anyone would like to visit to see the snakes, along with thousands of other animal specimens please get in touch www.facebook.com/uwizoologymuseum or <http://sta.uwi.edu/fst/life-sciences/zoology.asp>

People are both fascinated and repulsed by snakes, especially the Bushmaster. PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

