



# SAVANNAH RIVER ECOLOGY LABORATORY

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## Snakes of South Carolina and Georgia

### Snake Safety [Download flyer]

#### Family Colubridae (Non-venomous Snakes)

[Worm Snake \(\*Carphophis amoenus\*\)](#)  
[Scarlet Snake \(\*Cemophora coccinea\*\)](#)  
[Black Racer \(\*Coluber constrictor\*\)](#)  
[Ringneck Snake \(\*Diadophis punctatus\*\)](#)  
[Eastern Indigo Snake \(\*Drymarchon couperi\*\)](#)  
[Corn Snake \(\*Elaphe guttata\*\)](#)  
[Rat Snake \(\*Elaphe obsoleta\*\)](#)  
[Mud Snake \(\*Farancia abacura\*\)](#)  
[Rainbow Snake \(\*Farancia erythrogramma\*\)](#)  
[Eastern Hognose Snake \(\*Heterodon platirhinos\*\)](#)  
[Southern Hognose Snake \(\*Heterodon simus\*\)](#)  
[Mole Kingsnake \(\*Lampropeltis calligaster\*\)](#)  
[Eastern Kingsnake \(\*Lampropeltis getula\*\)](#)  
[Milk Snake/Scarlet Kingsnake \(\*Lampropeltis triangulum\*\)](#)  
[Coachwhip \(\*Masticophis flagellum\*\)](#)  
[Red-bellied Water Snake \(\*Nerodia erythrogaster\*\)](#)  
[Banded Water Snake \(\*Nerodia fasciata\*\)](#)  
[Green Water Snake \(\*Nerodia floridana\*\)](#)  
[Northern Water Snake \(\*Nerodia sipedon\*\)](#)  
[Brown Water Snake \(\*Nerodia taxispilota\*\)](#)  
[Rough Green Snake \(\*Ophedrys aestivus\*\)](#)  
[Pine Snake \(\*Pituophis melanoleucus\*\)](#)  
[Striped Crayfish Snake \(\*Regina alleni\*\)](#)  
[Glossy Crayfish Snake \(\*Regina rigida\*\)](#)  
[Queen Snake \(\*Regina septemvittata\*\)](#)  
[Pine Woods Snake \(\*Rhadinaea flavilata\*\)](#)  
[Black Swamp Snake \(\*Seminatrix pygaea\*\)](#)  
[Brown Snake \(\*Storeria dekayi\*\)](#)  
[Red-bellied Snake \(\*Storeria occipitomaculata\*\)](#)  
[Florida Brown Snake \(\*Storeria victa\*\)](#)  
[Southeastern Crowned Snake \(\*Tantilla coronata\*\)](#)  
[Central Florida Crowned Snake \(\*Tantilla relicta\*\)](#)  
[Eastern Ribbon Snake \(\*Thamnophis sauritus\*\)](#)  
[Eastern Garter Snake \(\*Thamnophis sirtalis\*\)](#)  
[Rough Earth Snake \(\*Virginia striatula\*\)](#)  
[Smooth Earth Snake \(\*Virginia valeriae\*\)](#)

#### Family Viperidae (Vipers)

[Copperhead \(\*Agkistrodon contortrix\*\) - Venomous](#)  
[Cottonmouth/Water Moccasin \(\*Agkistrodon piscivorus\*\) - Venomous](#)  
[Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake \(\*Crotalus adamanteus\*\) - Venomous](#)  
[Canebrake/Timber Rattlesnake \(\*Crotalus horridus\*\) - Venomous](#)  
[Pigmy Rattlesnake \(\*Sistrurus miliarius\*\) - Venomous](#)

#### Family Elapidae (Coral Snakes)

[Coral Snake \(\*Micrurus fulvius\*\) - Venomous](#)

[image preview]



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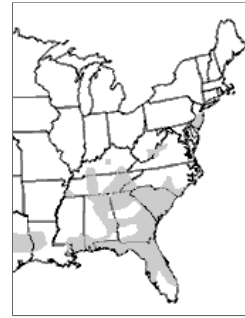
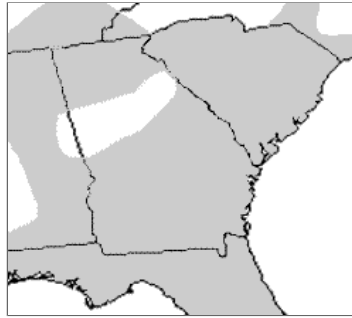
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## Pine Snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus*)

Photos by J.D. Willson unless otherwise noted



occur in Georgia and South Carolina, the northern pine snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus melanoleucus*) and the Florida pine snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus mugitus*). The pattern on Florida pine snakes is never as defined and sharp as it is in northern pine snakes, and they are generally browner in coloration. Also, the bellies of Florida pine snakes are uniformly ashy gray with no spots. Male snakes can be distinguished from females by the appearance of the tail. Males will have a longer tail that does not taper as quickly as the female tail.



**Range and Habitat:** Pine snakes are found across the Southeast, but their range is patchy. They are found throughout the Coastal Plain of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and throughout Florida, and in disjunct populations in the dry mountains of Virginia, Tennessee, and northern Georgia. A large, but isolated population occurs in the Pine Barrens of southern New Jersey. Coastal Plain snakes prefer flat and dry habitats with open canopies and are most common in sand hill and sandy pine barren habitats. This species is also found quite often in stands of longleaf pine or turkey oak forest. Occasionally individuals are seen in abandoned fields and dry mountain ridges. They are often associated with pocket gophers and gopher tortoises. Infertile, sandy soils are important habitat for pine snakes because they dig both hibernacula and summer dens.



**Habits:** These snakes are excellent burrowers, spending the majority of their time underground. Their occasional surface activity can be observed in the spring through the fall, particularly May to October. Pine snakes are oviparous and lay their eggs in June through August. They are known to build communal nests, with several females laying eggs in one spot. The eggs are some of the largest of any US snake and hatchlings hatch out at over 12 in (30.5 cm) in length. When pine snakes are first approached they tend to hiss very loudly, vibrate their tails, and strike.

**Conservation Status:** Pine snakes have no federal protection, but several states have them listed as threatened, with a few having laws protecting them. This species has been decreasing rapidly in its northeastern range and is believed to have been extirpated from West Virginia and Maryland. It is also at a high risk of being extirpated from the New Jersey pinelands. In Georgia, pine snakes are listed as threatened and have a state conservation rank of S3 (rare to uncommon). Some forestry ecologists consider fire exclusion and associated habitat degradation to be a cause of decline for the pine snake in eastern parts of its range.



**Account Author:** Benjamin Morrison, University of Georgia - edited by J.D. Willson



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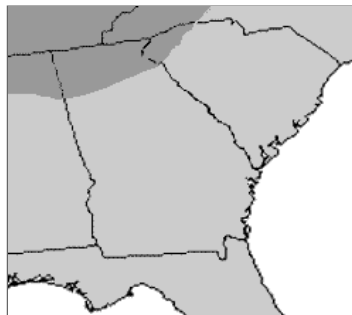
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## Scarlet Kingsnake / Eastern Milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulatum*)

Photos by J.D. Willson unless otherwise noted



Eastern milksnake    Scarlet kingsnake



### Description:

**Scarlet Kingsnake (*L. triangulum elapsoides*):** Scarlet kingsnakes are considerably smaller than milk snakes and reach lengths of 14 – 20 in (36-51 cm). The coloration and patterning is arguably the most beautiful of all snakes in our region. A mimic of the eastern coral snake (*Micrurus fulvius*), scarlet kingsnakes typically have alternating bands of red, black, and yellow in which red touches black but not yellow (in eastern coral snakes red touches yellow but not black). In the nonvenomous scarlet snake (*Cemophora coccinea*), that is similar in appearance, the bands across the back do not extend across the belly. In sections of northern Georgia and Tennessee the two milksnake subspecies are known to intergrade with varying results in pattern and coloration.

**Milk Snake (*L. triangulum triangulum*):** The milk snake is a mid-sized nonvenomous snake that attains lengths between 24 – 35 in (61-90 cm). It derives its scientific specific name from the triangular or Y-shaped light patch at the base of the head. It has a gray to tan background color with black-bordered brown blotches on the dorsum. The belly has a black and white checkerboard pattern. This species is often mistaken for the venomous copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix*), but copperheads have hourglass-shaped, rather than rounded or square blotches.

**Range and Habitat:** Milk snakes have one of the largest ranges of any snake species in the world. The species comprises 25 subspecies and a geographic distribution from Canada through the Midwest and eastern U.S. to Mexico and south into Ecuador. Eight of the subspecies are found in the U.S. Two subspecies, the eastern milk snake (*L. t. triangulum*) and the scarlet kingsnake (*L. t. elapsoides*), are found in our region. The scarlet king is found throughout Georgia, but is far more common in the Coastal Plain than in the Piedmont or mountains. The eastern milk snake and intergrades between the two are restricted to the mountains of northern Georgia and northwestern South Carolina. The eastern milksnake uses many habitats: fields, woodlands, rocky outcrops, and agricultural areas. Scarlet Kings are most common in well-drained sandy habitats in the Coastal Plain and particularly prefer pine forests and Sandhill habitats.

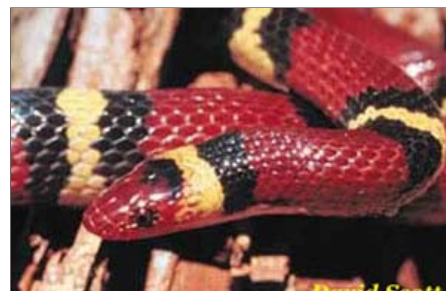
**Habits:** Milksnakes are sometimes active above ground during the day but are more often found in barns or "flipped" from beneath large rocks or boards. These snakes do not in fact milk cows; their presence in barns is instead representative of the abundance of rodents in such places. Scarlet kingsnakes are primarily fossorial (living underground) but are also adept at squeezing under dead bark and inside dead logs. They are generally very secretive, rarely seen "on the crawl," except at night or after heavy rains. Scarlet kingsnakes feed primarily on lizards (particularly skinks), but also eat small snakes and rodents.



Eastern milksnake



Eastern milksnake



Small snakes and rodents.

**Conservation Status:** The milk snakes are considered too common to be included on the IUCN Red List. They are not federally protected, but are protected by the state of Georgia as nonvenomous snakes by a twist of bureaucratic genius.



Scarlet kingsnake



Integrate milksnake from northern GA



Scarlet kingsnake eating a green anole



Scarlet kingsnake eating a green anole

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## Pigmy Rattlesnake (*Sistrurus miliarius*) - Venomous

Photos by J.D. Willson unless otherwise noted



**Description:** This small -- 14--22 in (38-56 cm) -- rattlesnake belongs to the genus *Sistrurus* and is commonly referred to as a pigmy rattler or ground rattler. Unlike the larger rattlesnakes of the genus *Crotalus*, this species has nine large scales on top of the head and a tiny rattle that can seldom be heard. There are three subspecies of pigmy rattlesnakes, of which two occur in Georgia (*Sistrurus miliarius miliarius* -- the Carolina pigmy rattler and *Sistrurus miliarius barbouri* -- the dusky pigmy rattler). Both subspecies have a row of mid-dorsal spots and a bar than runs from the eye to the base of the mouth, but the color of this bar can vary from black to brownish red. An orange or reddish brown dorsal stripe is also present on both subspecies. In young snakes, the tip of the tail is sulfur yellow and is used for caudal luring. The Carolina pigmy rattler can be gray, tan, or lavender. Some specimens from northern Georgia and eastern North Carolina are orange or red. The pattern of this subspecies is usually clean and well defined, with one or two rows of lateral spots. The venter is moderately patterned. The dusky pigmy ranges from bluish gray to nearly black. Numerous dark flecks often obscure the pattern of this subspecies. There are normally three rows of lateral spots, and the venter is heavily patterned.



**Range and Habitat:** The Carolina pigmy rattler is found in the northeastern, northwestern, and central portion of Georgia and throughout South Carolina. Dusky pigmy rattlers inhabit the southern Coastal Plain area. Although fairly common in the Coastal Plain of both states, populations in the Piedmont are few and scattered. Dusky pygmies inhabit areas near water sources like creeks, marshes, and swamps but can be found in a variety of habitats including pine and scrub oak sandhills, scrub pinewoods, mixed forests of pine and hardwoods, longleaf pine-wiregrass forests, swamps, and even xeric uplands. Carolina pygmies are generally restricted to drier habitats and are most common in sandhills and xeric pine forests. When available, this species is known to use gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) burrows as well as those of small mammals.



**Habits:** Pigmy rattlesnakes spend most of their time well-hidden among leaf litter and can be very hard to spot. From such hiding places they ambush a variety of prey including lizards, frogs, small mammals, and insects as well as centipedes. These snakes are most often encountered crossing roads on summer evenings. Females give birth to live young in the late summer or fall.

**Conservation Status:** This species is not protected by South Carolina or Georgia state law, but pigmy rattlesnakes are protected in North Carolina and Tennessee.

### Pertinent References:

May, P. G., T. M. Farrell, S. T. Heulett, M. A. Pilgrim, L. A. Bishop, D. J. Spence, A. M. Rabatsky, M. G. Campbell, A. D. Aycrigg, and W. E. Richardson. 1996. The seasonal abundance and activity of a rattlesnake (*Sistrurus miliarius barbouri*) in central Florida. *Copeia* 1996:389-401.



Roth, E. D., P. G. May, and T. M. Farrell. 1999. Pigmy rattlesnakes use frog-derived chemical cues to select foraging sites. *Copeia* 1999:772-774.

**Account Author:** Austin Meadows, University of Georgia – revised by J.D. Willson



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