

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

**Animal Abstract**

**Element Code:** ARADB04010

**Data Sensitivity:** No

**CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE**

**NAME:** *Chilomeniscus cinctus* Cope, 1861  
**COMMON NAME:** Banded Sandsnake  
**SYNONYMS:** *Sonora cinta* (Cope, 1861)  
*Sonora straminea* (Cope, 1860)  
*Chilomeniscus stramineus* Cope, 1860  
**OTHER COMMON NAMES:** Variable Sandsnake  
Banded Sand Snake  
Variable Sand Snake  
Western Sand Snake  
Culebra-arenera bandada [Spanish]  
**FAMILY:** Colubridae

**AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION:** *Chilomeniscus cinctus* Cope, 1861 - Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, Vol. 13, p. 303

**TYPE LOCALITY:** 'Cape St. Lucas, Lower California [Baja California Sur]'.

**TYPE SPECIMEN:** SDNHM = SDSNH 30368

**TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS:** The genus *Chilomeniscus* contains three species of small, arenicolus, semifossorial snakes found in the Sonoran Desert of the south-western United States and northwestern Mexico (Cox et al. 2018, Holycross et al. 2022a).

Formerly treated as *C. stramineus* (Brennan and Holycross 2006, Crother et al. 2017). Cox et al. (2018) proposed synonymizing *Chionactis* and *Chilomeniscus* with *Sonora* based on analyses of mitochondrial and nuclear DNA. Cox et al. (2018) recognized *cinctus*, *fasciatus*, and *stramineus* as separate species that together form a monophyletic clade, with specimens from Arizona recognized as *S. cincta*. Holycross and Mitchell (2020) and Holycross et al (2022a, 2022b) follow Cox et al (2018) in recognizing *cinctus* as a species but did not accept the use of *Sonora* as the genus. Instead, they follow one of Cox et al's alternate proposals and retain *Chilomeniscus* and *Chionactis* (now including *C. aemula* and *C. mosaueri*) because it is more conducive to stability. HDMS follows Holycross and Mitchell (2020) and Holycross et al. (2022b) in treating the species as *Chilomeniscus cinctus*.

**DESCRIPTION:** Total length 17.8–25.4 cm (7–10 inches). Fairly stout bodied, with 14 to 39 black dorsal crossbands on ground color of pale yellow, yellowish white or orange. Some

individuals with orange saddles between the black bands. Ventrally white to cream (Stebbins 1966:178)

**AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION:** Shovel shaped snout and dorsal color are features commonly used in identification. Distinguished from the shovel-nosed snakes and the Western Groundsnake by the internasal scales not touching each other (Holycross et al. 2022b).

**ILLUSTRATIONS:** Color drawing (Stebbins 1966: plate 32)  
Color photo (Behler and King 1979: plate 605)  
Color photo (Holycross et al. 2022b: page 115)

**TOTAL RANGE:** Central and southwestern Arizona south through much of coastal Sonora to northern Sinaloa, Mexico (Holycross and Mitchell 2020).

**RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA:** Central and southwestern Arizona from San Pedro River Valley westward throughout much of Maricopa, Pima, and Pinal counties with a few documented locations in Yuma County (Holycross and Mitchell 2020).

### **SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS**

**BIOLOGY:** Crepuscular and nocturnal. Not venomous. One of the smallest Southwestern U.S. snakes (Nafis 2024). Preyed upon by ringtails, large scorpions, and other snakes (Holycross et al. 2022b).

**REPRODUCTION:** Oviparous. Likely mates in spring, and lays 2–4 eggs in July-August. Hatchlings have been found in October (Holycross et al. 2022b).

**FOOD HABITS:** Preys on a variety of invertebrates including native roaches, ant and termite larvae, beetle larvae, spiders, centipedes, and other invertebrates (Holycross et al. 2022b).

**HABITAT:** In Arizona, fossorial in sandy and sandy-gravelly soils, prefers open and sandy creosote habitats, also in sandy soils of washes and arroyos in rocky upland (palo verde-saguaro) habitat. It is usually encountered in or near washes, mesquite bosques, and other areas with fine to coarse sand and leaf litter (Holycross et al 2022b).

**ELEVATION:** Found at elevations ranging from 200–3,000 ft (Brennan 2023).

**PLANT COMMUNITY:** Sonoran Desertscrub, Arizona Upland subdivision

**POPULATION TRENDS:** Unknown but presumed stable.

**SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION**

Status definitions: <https://bit.ly/hdms-status-definitions>

Heritage Network Conservation Status Rank definitions: <https://bit.ly/hdms-rank-definitions>

**ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS:****STATE STATUS:**

2 (AZGFD, AWCS 2022)

**HERITAGE NETWORK STATUS:**

G5

S4

**OTHER STATUS:**

PR, Determined Subject to Special Protection in Mexico (Secretaría de Medio Ambiente 2010)

***PREVIOUS STATUS*****STATE STATUS:**

1B (AZGFD, SWAP 2012)

**MANAGEMENT FACTORS:** Limited distribution. May be impacted by urbanization and agricultural development.

**PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:**

**SUGGESTED PROJECTS:** Distribution, habitat, population and life history studies.

**LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:****SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION****REFERENCES:**

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- Stebbins, R.C. 1966. A field guide to western reptiles and amphibians. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. pp.178.

## MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The genus name *Chilomeniscus* comes from the Greek for lip (*cheilos*) and crescent (*meniscus*) referring to the shape of the snout. The species name *cinctus* comes from the Latin for belt (*cinctum*), referring to the dark bands (Holycross and Mitchell 2020).

**Revised:** 1991-03-18 (???)  
 2023-03-02 (MBL)  
 2024-11-23 (CPS)  
 2025-01-31 (MSB)

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