

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

Animal Abstract

Element Code: ARADB44011

Data Sensitivity: Yes

CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE

NAME: *Senticolis triaspis* (Cope, 1866)

COMMON NAME: Green Ratsnake

SYNONYMS: *Elaphe triaspis* (Cope, 1866)

Coluber triaspis Cope, 1866

Pityophis intermedius Boettger, 1883

OTHER COMMON NAMES: Green Rat Snake

Northern Green Ratsnake

Culebra oliva (Spanish)

FAMILY: Colubridae

AUTHOR, PUBLICATION: Boettger, 1883

TYPE LOCALITY: Belize

TYPE SPECIMEN: USNM 24903, a juvenile male collected by Dr. Parsons, date of collection unknown

TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS: *Senticolis triaspis* is the sole species in *Senticolis* (Dahn et al. 2018). There are three subspecies of *Senticolis triaspis*: *S. t. intermedia*, *S. t. mutabilis*, and *S. t. triaspis* (Price 1991, Roth-Monzón et al. 2021); only *intermedia* occurs in the U.S. (Price 1991, Nicholson 2025), and is the subspecies present in Arizona (Murphy 2018, Holycross and Mitchell 2020).

Previously treated as *Elaphe triaspis* (Collins et al 1982). Dowling and Fries (1987) proposed the genus *Senticolis* for the taxon. This was accepted by Collins (1990) and Crother et al. (2000). Keogh (1996) demonstrated the separation of *Elaphe* and *Senticolis* in a phylogenetic context.

DESCRIPTION: Green Ratsnakes are medium to large, slim body snakes with a narrow head that is distinct from the neck. (Holycross and Mitchell 2020). The total length can measure up to 1,600 mm (Holycross et al. 2022). The head is wider than the body leaving a distinct variation between head and body (Murphy 2018). They are a plain yellowish green, greyish

green, or olive snake with unmarked, whitish, or cream underparts tinged with yellow (Holycross et al. 2022). Some adults may have black at the dorsal tip of the tail (Holycross and Mitchell 2020). When looking at the snake from above its snout is squared (Bartlett and Bartlett 2013).

Juveniles are characterized by a frontoparietal band that has a central opening that extends to the posterior frontal scute and having 80 or more blotches (Price 1991). The dorsum has greyish-green transverse blotches that will go away with age (Murphy 2018). Juveniles have a distinctive pattern on the crown of the head with a dark, irregular, and elongated Y-shaped marking on the parietals (Holycross and Mitchell 2020). The hatchlings can be gray, tan, or a pale green with dark brown blotches on the back and smaller blotches on the sides totaling 82-108 blotches (Holycross and Mitchell 2020).

AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION: Green Ratsnakes are easily distinguished from other snakes in Arizona by their narrow head and uniform green dorsal coloration (Holycross and Mitchell 2020). Juveniles could potentially be mistaken for Glossy Snake (*Arizona elegans*), but are distinguished by the presence of three elongate temporal scales in Green Ratsnakes and the presence of a countersunk lower jaw and an undivided cloacal scute in Glossy Snakes (Holycross and Mitchell 2020).

ILLUSTRATIONS:

Color photo (Behler and King 1979: plate 479)

Color drawing (Stebbins 2003: plate 45)

Color photos (Murphy 2018)

Color photos (Holycross and Mitchell 2020)

Color photos (Holycross et al 2022)

Color photos (Brennan 2023)

Color photos (Uetz 2025)

TOTAL RANGE: Distribution ranges from southeast Arizona and southwest New Mexico southward along slopes of Mexican highlands to Costa Rica (Murphy 2018).

RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA: Baboquivari, Pajarito, Santa Rita, Empire, Whetstone, and Chiricahua mountains in southeastern Arizona (Murphy 2018). Although rumors persist about its presence in the Huachuca Mountains, there are no vouchers supporting this (Holycross et al. 2022).

SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS

BIOLOGY: The Green Ratsnake is diurnal and crepuscular, but they may become active at night to avoid the summer heat (Murphy 2018). Slow-moving, and motionless when approached. They move slowly to hunt for food through the rocky terrain (Radke & Malcom 2005). Green Ratsnakes are generally a secretive species and will rarely expose themselves, but stay hidden in vegetation, rocks, talus, debris, or rodent burrows (Radke and Malcom 2008). Season activity in Arizona is from May to October (Murphy 2018). Individuals that live in temperate zones of Arizona will undergo hibernation because of the colder winters and generally become active again in the spring (Holycross and Mitchell 2020).

Their main predators include raptors, mammals, and snakes. Snakes documented as predators include Sonoran Whip Snake (*Masticophis bilineatus*) and Coachwhip (*Masticophis flagellum*) (Holycross and Mitchell 2020). Some known parasites of the species are bacteria: *Klebsiella*, *Proteus*, *Pseudomonas*, protozoans: *Coccidea*, *Trichomonas*, hemogregarines, and trypanosomes (Holycross and Mitchell 2020).

REPRODUCTION: There have been reports of 3 to 9 eggs between the summer months of June and July in a clutch in good condition and female at the proper breeding age (Murphy 2018). The general incubation period lasts between 77–88 days at 26–28 °C, (78.8–82.4°F). Reported hatch size ranges from 320–360 mm TL weighing about 11–22.5 g (Holycross and Mitchell 2020).

FOOD HABITS: Rodents, birds, bats, and lizards, but primarily small mammals. They can climb trees or bushes in order to look for food (Holycross et al. 2022).

HABITAT: Green Ratsnakes are found on rocky slopes of the southeastern mountain ranges in Arizona, primarily in ecotones between woodland and more open habitats or in riparian corridors (Holycross et al. 2022). It occurs in rocky mountain canyons in woodland and chaparral habitats, often near streams on east-facing slopes, and usually with rocks nearby. Males like riparian habitats while females tend to like desertscrub (Murphy 2018).

ELEVATION: 0–6,561 ft. (0–1,999.79 m)

PLANT COMMUNITY: Madrean Evergreen Woodland. Associated species in desertscrub include *Opuntia* spp. (Prickly Pear Cactus), *Vachellia constricta* (Whitethorn Acacia), *Cylindropuntia spinosior* (Cane Cholla), *Agave palmeri* (Palmer's Agave), *Nolina microcarpa* (Narrowleaf Beargrass), and *Fouquieria splendens* (Ocotillo) (Radke & Malcom 2008). Woodland species include *Juniperus deppeana* (Alligator Juniper), *Quercus* spp. (oaks), and *Pinus* spp. (pines). The riparian areas are covered by species such as *Juglans major* (Black

Walnut), *Platanus wrightii* (Arizona Sycamore), *Fraxinus velutina* (Arizona Ash), *Spotobolus wrightii* (Giant Sacaton), *Salix gooddingii* (Gooding's Willow), *Prosopis glandulosa* (Honey Mesquite), and *Celtis reticulata* (Netleaf hackberry) (Hoycross and Mitchell 2020).

POPULATION TRENDS: Not at risk currently but due to vehicles death rate has gone up. They are protected in some areas from habitation alteration (Hoycross et al. 2022).

SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION

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

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

AGENCY STATUS

Endangered Species Act:

State: 2, at full species (AZGFD, AWCS 2022)

U.S. Forest Service: Sensitive, (USDA, FS Region 3 2007, 2013)

Bureau of Land Management:

OTHER STATUS

Heritage Network Status: G5T4

S2

IUCN: LC (Hammerson et al. 2015)

PREVIOUS STATUS

AGENCY STATUS

State Status: 1B, at full species (AZGFD, SWAP 2012)

U.S. Forest Service: Not Sensitive (USDA, FS Region 3, 1999)

Sensitive, at species level (USDA, FS Region 3 1988)

MANAGEMENT FACTORS:

PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:

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

LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:

BLM - Las Cienegas National Conservation Area

NPS - Chiricahua National Monument, Fort Bowie National Historic Site

State - State Trust Land

Tribal - Tohono O'odham Nation

USFS - Coronado National Forest
USFWS - Leslie Canyon National Wildlife Refuge
Private

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The genus *Senticolis* is derived from the Latin words sentis means either thorn or bramble and colis meaning penis, in reference to the large basal spines on the hemipenis, which distinguishes it from its relatives (Uetz 2025). *Triaspis* is derived from the Greek words treis meaning three and aspis meaning shield (Holycross and Mitchell 2020), which according to the original description refers to the unusual three anterior temporals, directed upward and backward.

External Links:

- [Arizona Wildlife Conservation Strategy](#)
[NatureServe Explorer](#)
[iNaturalist](#)

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