

ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Animal Abstract

Element Code: ARADB35120Data Sensitivity: No **CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE****NAME:** *Tantilla wilcoxi***COMMON NAME:** Chihuahuan Black-headed Snake, Huachuca Black-headed Snake**SYNONYMS:****FAMILY:** Serpentes: Colubridae**AUTHOR, PUBLICATION:** Stejneger, Smithsonian Inst. Proceed. of the USNM Vol. XXV (1903).**TYPE LOCALITY:** Fort Huachuca, Arizona.**TYPE SPECIMEN:** USNM 19674, collected by T.E. Wilcox.**TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS:** About 45 species in genus from southern U.S. to South America. Two subspecies in *T. wilcoxi* but only *T. w. wilcoxi* occurs in Arizona.**DESCRIPTION:** Stebbins (1966 and 1985). Head broad, much wider than the neck, with large eyes (pupils small and round). Total length 7-14 inches. Dorsally brown; black cap on head, bordered by broad white collar that crosses the tips of the parietals. The light collar is bordered with black band, 1-1.5 scales wide. Brown above, with dark spots on the sides. Ventrally dull and pale anteriorly, becoming bright red or orange toward tail. Back scales are smooth and in 15 rows. Anal plate is divided. Ventral scales number 148-157. 62 caudal scales in two rows beneath the tail.**AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION:** The broad white collar that crosses the tips of the parietals, will distinguish this species from all other *Tantilla* species. This snakes coloration and lack of dark markings on the belly distinguish it from the similar looking [Ring-necked Snake](#).

The Chihuahuan Black-headed Snake is most easily confused with other species of *Tantilla*, particularly the Yaqui Black-headed Snake (*T. yaquia*). However, in that species the light collar does not touch the parietal scales and there is no dark line or row of spots immediately posterior to the light collar. Both the Yaqui and Chihuahuan Black-headed Snakes have light cheek patches, but in the former, all of the sixth supralabial is white, whereas in the latter the dark head cap usually intrudes onto the sixth supralabial. In Smith's Black-headed Snake (*T. hobartsmithi*) the light collar is often absent, or if present it is often faint or thin. Furthermore, that light collar does not touch the parietal scales and a dark band or row of dots is not present posterior to it. The Plains Black-headed Snake (*T. nigriceps*) does not have a light collar. The minute dark spots on the dorsal scales present in the Chihuahuan

Black-headed Snake are also present in Smith's Black-headed Snake, but are absent in the Yaqui and Plains Black-headed Snakes. The Ring-necked Snake (*Diadophis punctatus*) is superficially similar to the Black-headed Snakes, but it has loreal scales (may be missing on one side) and dark spots on the ventral surface (Rorabaugh 2016).

ILLUSTRATIONS:

Black and white drawing (Stebbins 1966: plate 35)

Black and white drawing (Stebbins 1985: plate 41)

Black and white drawing (Behler and King 1979: 662)

Color Photo: <http://www.reptilesfaz.org/Snakes-Subpages/h-t-wilcoxi.html>

Color Photo:

<http://www.californiaherps.com/noncal/southwest/swsnakes/pages/t.wilcoxi.html>

TOTAL RANGE: Southeast Arizona south to eastern Sinaloa, Durango, Nuevo Leon, San Luis Potosi and Jalisco, Mexico.

RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA: Southeast corner of the state. Huachuca (Ramsey Canyon), Santa Rita, and Patagonia Mountains. Pima, Santa Cruz and Cochise counties.

SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS

BIOLOGY: Nocturnal. Inactive in cold as well as hot temperatures. A fossorial species that spend much time foraging for prey in leaf litter and under debris.

REPRODUCTION: Lays 1-3 eggs in spring and summer.

FOOD HABITS: Small arthropods; burrowing grubs, centipedes, and spiders.

HABITAT: Lives mainly on cactus-covered rocky hills, in grasslands and in pine-oak forests. in shaded rocky canyons and on relatively open, sunny, and rocky slopes. Of the four species of *Tantilla* found in Arizona, the Chihuahuan Black-headed Snake is the most specialized in terms of habitat use. Throughout its range, it is primarily a species of montane canyons and slopes in oak or pine-oak woodland. Although Stebbins (2003) and Lowe (1964) report that its distribution extends into desert or semi-desert grasslands, all Arizona and Sonora localities are within montane woodlands. Most specimens are found under rocks, dead yuccas, agaves, sotols, or other surface debris (Rorabaugh 2016).

ELEVATION: Around 3,000-8,000 feet (910-2,440 m). Behler and King (1979) reports elevations of 3,000-5,000 feet (900-1,500 m). Arizona collections range from 5068 – 6150 feet (1545-1875m), Rorabaugh 2016.

PLANT COMMUNITY: Madrean Evergreen Woodland and Petran Montane Conifer Forest (Brennan 2016). Desert-grasslands (by some reports) and evergreen woodlands.

POPULATION TRENDS: Unknown for Arizona. There are nine known occurrences within the State, two in the Santa Rita Mountains and the remainder in the Huachuca Mountains. NatureServe states that there are at least a few dozen occurrences range-wide, a total population that exceeds 10,000 individuals, and believes the short term trend is relatively stable.

SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS: None
STATE STATUS: 2 (AZGFD, AWCS 2022)
[1B (AGFD SWAP 2012)]
OTHER STATUS: ANHP Peripheral Mexican
Forest Service Sensitive (USDA, FS Region
3 2013)

MANAGEMENT FACTORS: Its montane woodland habitats are at risk in Arizona from wildfire and climate change. Major stand-replacing fires in the Huachuca and Santa Rita mountains over the last 40 years have degraded the habitat of this species, while in some areas of Mexico forested habitats of the Chihuahuan Black-headed Snake have been heavily logged. Mining can eliminate habitat of this species locally (Rorabaugh 2016).

PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN: Listed as a USDA Forest Service Sensitive species and all of the nine occurrences in Arizona are on or adjacent to Forest Service lands. Three occurrences are within wilderness areas.

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

LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP: USDA Forest Service, Coronado National Forest (three collections within the Miller Peak Wilderness Area); USDI Bureau of Land Management; USDI National Park Service, Coronado National Memorial; and portions of five private land holdings.

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

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MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:

C.J. Cole, Curator Emeritus, American Mus. Nat. Hist., New York
 Tom Jones, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Phoenix, AZ

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Venom is delivered to prey via enlarged, grooved teeth in the rear upper jaw (not considered to be dangerous to humans), Brennan 2016.

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