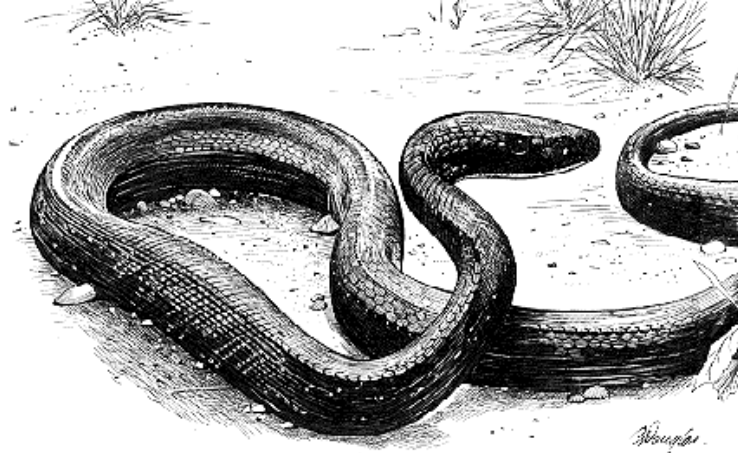


Black Rat Snake

Scientific Name: *Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta*



Did You Know?

- Black rat snakes, when cornered or threatened, will often coil in a defensive posture, hiss, and strike repeatedly. They also rapidly shake or vibrate the tail. This results in many people mistaking this dangerous-looking snake for a rattlesnake or even a copperhead due to its bold behavior and color pattern,
- Old-timers sometimes refer to the black rat snake as the "pilot snake" in the mistaken belief that this snake pilots or guides the venomous rattlesnake to safe denning areas in the forest. Another common name is the chicken snake because the black rat is sometimes found near chicken coops and henhouses, where they may sometimes feed on chicken eggs.
- The black rat snake is one of several species of rat snakes occurring in the United States. Rat snakes are large, powerful, non-venomous snakes that feed on a variety of prey species, which they overpower by constriction. They are the largest snake found in Georgia.
- Black rat snakes emerge from their rocky crevice retreats in late April or early May. They hibernate with other rat snakes and/or with many other snake species, most notably timber rattlesnakes, racers, and bull snakes.
- They are diurnal (active during the day) even during hot weather, though they do move at night on occasion.
- When approached, black rats usually remain motionless. With their cryptic black coloration, they become invisible against the bark or dark forest floor.
- The black rat snake is a proficient climber. Often it goes rather high up into trees, where it uses cavities or hollows formerly occupied by other animals such as birds or mammals.
- Black rat snakes are extremely beneficial since they eat large amounts of rats, mice, and other pest animals. Farmers appreciate having snakes around for this reason.

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General Information on Black Rat Snakes

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS:

The black rat snake can reach a length of eight feet, but is usually much smaller. The adult snake is black with a white or creamy yellow chin and throat. In contrast to the black racer, the belly of a rat snake is a mixture of light and dark, giving a somewhat mottled appearance. Light areas are often apparent between scales, and the scales on the back are weakly keeled. A juvenile rat snake is gray with light spots running down the middle of the back, and has white eyes. This pattern darkens with age and is generally undetectable once the snake reaches a length of three feet.

RANGE:

This subspecies has a very broad range throughout Eastern North America, from southeastern Minnesota to northern Louisiana and east to the eastern seaboard.

HABITAT:

They may occupy many types of habitats ranging from deep woods to forest edges, overgrown fields and meadows. They often enter abandoned or little used buildings, barns and even attics and wall spaces in search of rodents, making these snakes valuable but often unwelcome guests as they feed on destructive pests.

NESTING:

Mating generally takes place in the spring, with 10-14 eggs laid in June or July. Eggs deposited beneath rocks or in manure piles, rotting vegetation, stumps or logs generally hatch in August and September. Garden mulch piles are often utilized, resulting in frantic human behavior when hatchlings or eggs are discovered!

FEEDING HABITS:

The adults usually consume rodents. Mice, chipmunks, voles, shrews, even full grown squirrels have been reported in its diet. These snakes probably prey on birds and bird's eggs most heavily of all snakes because of their climbing ability and time spent in trees. The young will feed on frogs, especially treefrogs, lizards and young mice.