

Florida Pine Snake

Scientific Name: *Pituophis melanoleucus mugitus*



Did You Know?

- The Florida pine snake is a powerful constrictor.
- Pine snakes break eggshells internally much as the yellow rat snake does.
- They dig out pocket gophers with the large vertical plate on their snouts. They also eat rats, small rabbits, squirrels, birds and bird eggs.
- Typical of most pine snakes, Florida pine snakes will usually raise the anterior portion of the body and loosely coil up and hiss very loudly while preparing to strike. They will strike very quickly to scare off a predator.
- Studies have shown the Florida pine snake occupies large home ranges: one study using radio telemetry in Florida indicated 2 adult females occupied territories 11 and 12 ha (27.5 and 30 acres) each, while 3 males used areas 2-8 time larger.
- Pine snakes spend as much as 85% of their time underground, often in the burrows of pocket gophers or, less frequently, gopher tortoises.
- Pine snakes seem to have a high metabolism compared to their kin. It is not unusual for a neonate/juvenile to feed every 4-5 days; as an adult weekly feedings work well, although periodically the Florida pine may go on a fast lasting several weeks.

Chattahoochee NATURE CENTER

General Information on Florida Pine Snakes

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS:

The Florida Pine Snake is a highly variable snake. The ground color ranges from an off white to ash gray. The top is blotched; on the bottom portion of the body the blotches are ill defined, becoming more distinct farther toward the rear. Blotches themselves are highly variable, being almost invisible in some animals to black, dark tan or almost brick red in others. The Florida pine snake is the largest of the eastern species.

RANGE:

The Florida pine snake occurs in suitable habitat throughout most of Florida (excluding the Keys), southern and middle Georgia, southeastern Alabama, and the southwestern quarter of South Carolina. It intergrades with the black pine snake in Escambia County, Florida, and in peninsular Alabama east of Mobile Bay, and with the northern pine snake across middle Georgia on a line roughly from Columbus through Augusta and into South Carolina around Barnwell and Aiken. The Florida pine snake seems to be absent from a considerable portion of southwestern Georgia.

HABITAT:

Florida pine snakes are found in sandy, open areas, including pine-turkey oak woodland, abandoned fields and longleaf pine forests. This environment is characterized by soft, sandy soil frequented by the burrowing rodents upon which the Florida pine snake most often preys.

NESTING:

Breeding occurs in spring, and 4-8 large, whitish eggs are laid in pocket gopher burrows during mid to late summer. The 18-20 inch (46-51 cm) young hatch in September-October.

FEEDING HABITS:

The Florida pine snake feeds primarily on pocket gophers, which it pursues by forcing its way into their underground burrows. Other small mammals, lizards, and reptile eggs are also eaten. It may occasionally climb trees in search of birds and their nests. However, it is this species' dependence on pocket gophers that likely limits it to sandy-soil habitats.