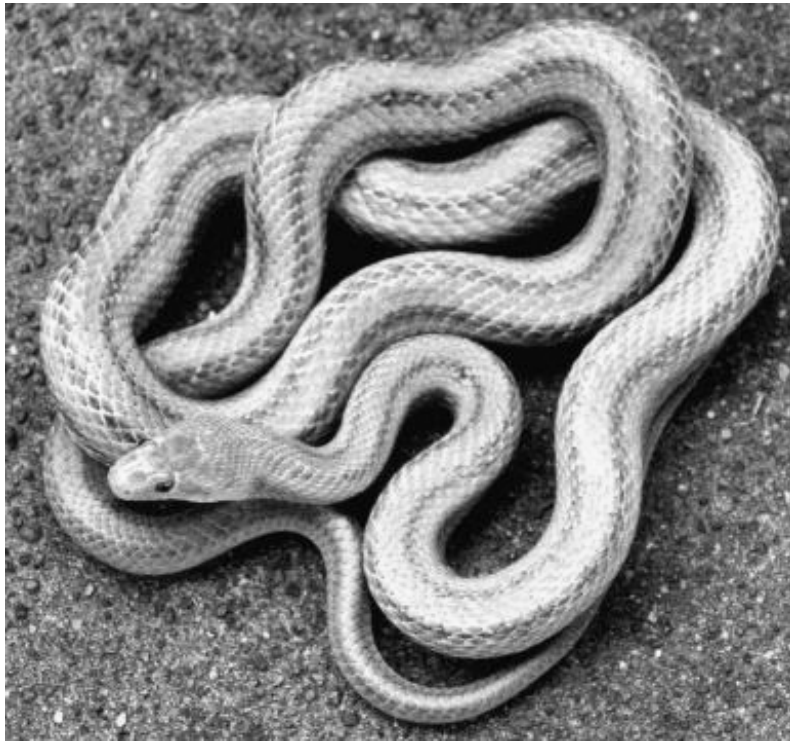


# Yellow Rat Snake

Scientific Name: *Elaphe obsoleta quadrivittata*



## Did You Know?

- They are known to interbreed with the black rat snake. Such intergraded specimens may have a much darker greenish background.
- Yellow rat snakes often climb in trees.
- Rat snakes are relatively slow moving and will most often “freeze” when first encountering danger. This is why so many are killed on roadways.
- When “freezing” on the ground they will often take on a rippled posture, looking like a large unironed ribbon.
- They are good climbers and at least partially arboreal, typified by climbing into magnolia and live-oak trees. The angles in its belly scales help to grip the irregularities on the boles of rocks, trees, and cliffs. It moves by throwing its body into a series of horizontal waves that flow continuously from head to tail.
- When disturbed, they often vibrate their tail rapidly. In dry leaves the resulting noise may cause it to be mistaken for a rattlesnake. When cornered it may literally stand up and fight, with the front portion of the body reared upward, the head drawn back in an S-curve, and the mouth held open in readiness to strike. Sometimes it will hiss as it lunges forward.
- Yellow rat snakes are solitary animals except during the mating season.

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# General Information on Yellow Rat Snakes

## IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS:

Adult Yellow Rat Snakes are distinguished by 4 dark stripes against a lighter background of yellow. Young rat snakes are strongly blotched against a gray background and could be easily mistaken for a different subspecies. They are generally bright or straw yellow with distinct brownish or black stripes. The brightest, most golden-yellowed specimens come from Florida. Farther north, they are darker and less brilliantly colored. The tongue is black and the scales are weakly keeled (a keel is a sharp ridge). While non-venomous, it does have, rows of teeth on the upper and lower jaw. It tends to be flat-bottomed, with its sides sloping upward, not bowed out as they are in most snakes. It grows to be 4 to 5 feet and is approximately 2 inches in diameter, although it can be larger.

## RANGE:

Coastal North and South Carolina, southward throughout peninsular Florida. Yellow rat snakes from the southern tip of their range tend to be more golden butter yellow overall and have lots of yellow highlights on the belly and under the chin, compared to the tannish, straw yellow-colored yellow rat snakes from central and northern Florida.

## HABITAT:

Common in great river swamps of the south, it forages high into cypress and other trees. It also occurs in other habitats such as live-oak hammocks, cutover woods, fallow fields, and around barns and abandoned buildings.

## NESTING:

It is an egg-laying or oviparous species. Eggs are laid in damp ground, under rocks, in leaves, or in rotten logs, and their incubation is left to the heat of the sun. The clutch consists of 5 to 3 smooth-shelled, creamy white eggs, which are 1 1/4 inches in length and 7/8 inches in diameter. A freshly hatched snake is about 12 inches in length and it is gray with squarish blotches, which tend to send out line-like extensions from the corners. It remains well blotched until almost a yard long. Above this length, blotches fade and the bands become more evident.

## FEEDING HABITS:

It feeds almost entirely upon warm-blooded prey, mostly mice, young rats, or small birds. Young snakes may eat lizards and frogs, particularly tree frogs. It constricts its prey in its strong coils and then swallows it whole.