

Upland Snake Species Profile:

Pigmy Rattlesnake

Sistrurus miliarius



Photo: D. Stevenson

Range: Pigmy rattlesnakes can be found from southern North Carolina south through the Florida Keys and west to eastern Texas and Oklahoma.

Identification: Compared to other rattlesnake species, pigmy rattlesnakes are relatively small, reaching maximum lengths of 83 cm (32 inches). They are characterized by dark dorsal blotches and one to three rows of dark spots on its sides. The body is typically gray or tan, but individuals in North Carolina may be orange to red.

Natural History: Pigmy rattlesnakes tend to be associated with habitats within the vicinity of water, such as mixed turkey oak-longleaf pine forest, scrub pinewoods, sand hills and wiregrass and palmetto flatwoods. They may take shelter in gopher tortoise burrows or small mammal tunnels within these areas.

This species prey on a wide variety of animals, including birds, snakes, lizards, frogs, insects, and mammals. Juveniles possess a bright yellow tail, which is used to lure potential prey animals into striking range. They are known to ambush prey while sitting along prey trails and also actively search for food.

The venom of the pigmy rattlesnake is efficient at incapacitating small mammals, but bites to humans are not considered life-threatening or uncommon.

Pigmy rattlesnakes are preyed on by many animals, including raccoons, skunks, dogs, opossums and other snakes.

Conservation: Habitat loss and fragmentation have the potential to severely reduce populations of pigmy rattlesnakes, however they remain locally abundant in some areas. Road mortality may also be a significant threat to this species.

In Kentucky and Tennessee, the pigmy rattlesnake has been designated as threatened.

Useful References:

Conant, R. and J.T. Collins. 1998. A Field Guide to the Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America. Houghton Mifflin Company. New York.

Ernst, C.H. and E.M. Ernst. 2003. Snakes of the United States and Canada. Smithsonian Institution. Washington.

For more information, contact:



GOPHER TORTOISE COUNCIL

c/o Florida Museum of
Natural History

P. O. Box 117800

Gainesville, FL 32611-7800

www.gophertortoisecouncil.org