

# Upland Snake Species Profile:

## Coachwhip

### *Masticophis flagellum*

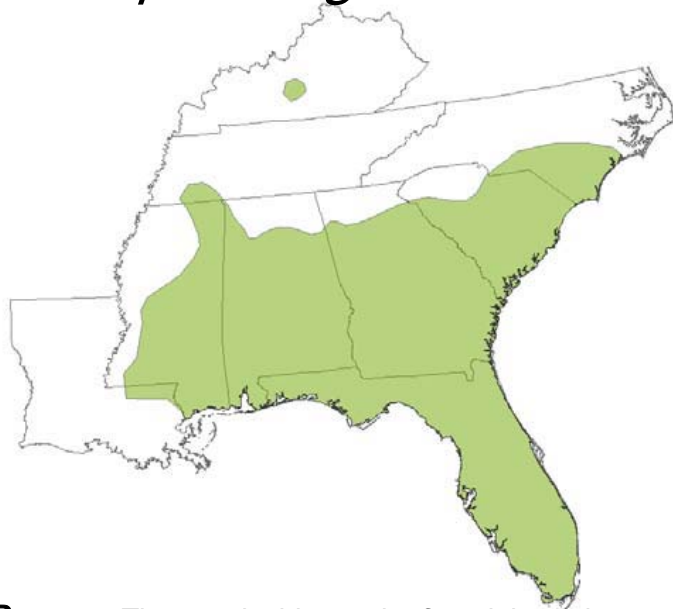


Photo: G. Miller

**Range:** The coachwhip can be found throughout the southern United States, but the only subspecies east of the Mississippi is the eastern coachwhip, *M.F. flagellum*. The eastern coachwhip can be found from southeastern North Carolina to Florida and reaches the westernmost portion of its range in Texas. This snake is also known from Kentucky. The range map shown is for the eastern coachwhip within the southeast.

**Identification:** Coachwhips are long, slender snakes usually reaching about 125 cm (50 inches), although much longer individuals are possible. Eastern coachwhips typically have a black or dark brown body with a lighter tail and a dark head, but coloration is variable in this species. Occasionally, tan coachwhips can be found in the southern limit of their range, such as in Florida and Georgia. In these snakes, the dark scale outlines are clearly visible.

**Natural History:** Coachwhips prefer dry habitats, such as scrubland, but may also be found in flatwoods and oak woodlands. A fast snake, it can sometimes be sighted crawling along with its head held high above the ground, perhaps helping it locate prey. An efficient predator, coachwhips may feed on a wide variety of animals, including lizards, small mammals and birds.

In June or July, females lay approximately 10 eggs in rotting vegetation and logs; the hatchlings may emerge 2-3 months later. When coachwhips are encountered, their first response is usually to speed away quickly. When captured, however, the snake may become aggressive, biting frequently.

**Conservation:** Eastern coachwhips may be locally abundant, particularly in areas undisturbed by human activity. However, little is known about populations of the species within the southeast. More data is needed to accurately determine the status of this snake. Coachwhips have been designated as a species of special concern in Alabama and North Carolina and are thought to have been extirpated from Kentucky. Human development, including roads and other forms of habitat destruction, as well as the use of insecticides, may play a large role in the potential imperilment of this species.

### 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.

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