

Eastern, Gray, & Western Ratsnake

Pantherophis alleghaniensis, P. spiloides, & P. obsoletus
Upland Snake Species Profile



Ratsnakes (eastern pictured above) occur throughout most of the gopher tortoise's range.

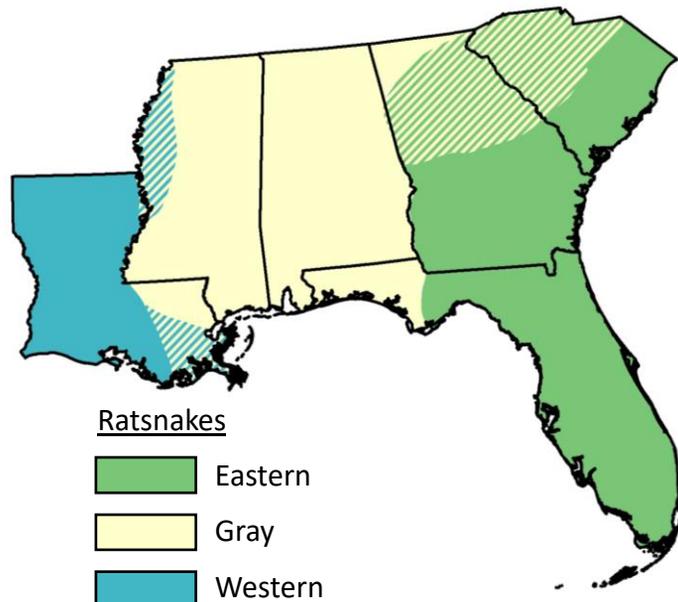
Name Game

Ratsnakes are referred to by several different locally-common monikers throughout their range, including oak snake, chicken snake, black snake, white oak runner, goose snake, and pilot snake, among others.

Range and Appearance: Three species of ratsnakes can be found throughout the gopher tortoise's range, and occur from New York, through Minnesota, and Texas. Until recently, these snakes were considered one species with several subspecies; however, recent taxonomic studies described three distinct species with areas of uncertainty where their ranges meet (see range map for species distribution; hatched areas represent areas of uncertainty). Eastern ratsnakes are variable in coloration and the species appear nearly identical in different regions. In south Florida and the Everglades, these snakes are orange with faint striping along their sides. In central Florida and Atlantic coastal areas, these snakes are yellow with black stripes along their sides, and inland, they are overall silver-gray with dark grey blotches along their backs.

Likewise, throughout the southern portion of their range, gray ratsnakes are overall-silver gray with dark gray blotching but may be nearly entirely black in the northern portion of their range. Western ratsnakes have a silvery-red body color with dark blotches. There is significant gene flow where the species meet, and intergrades between the species occur in these regions. Ratsnakes are long, slender snakes. The largest specimens have measured over 250 cm (about 8 ft), but typical sizes are between 100 - 200 cm (about 3 - 6.5 ft).

Reproduction: Breeding typically occurs in spring through early summer and eggs are deposited in moist areas including stump holes and rotting logs. The average clutch size is about 15 eggs, and the eggs hatch after about 60 days. Hatchlings of all species are typically silver-gray and have irregular dark blotches.



**Upland Snake
Conservation Initiative**

www.gophertortoiseCouncil.org

Ratsnakes

Pantherophis alleghaniensis, *P. spiloides*, & *P. obsoletus*

Natural History: Ratsnakes use many natural community types including hardwood, pine, and mixed forests, open and agricultural areas, and suburban areas. Ratsnakes are excellent climbers and frequently scale trees in search of food, but also take shelter underground. They are generally most active during the daytime but may shift to a nocturnal activity pattern during periods of hot weather. During periods of cool or cold weather, ratsnakes seek shelter in stump holes, root masses, or under large rocks. In northern portions of their range, they hibernate communally in rock crevices along with other snake species. Ratsnakes are active hunters and subdue prey through constriction. Their generalist diet consists of small mammals, birds, eggs, and bats. Ratsnakes can sometimes be seen perched on tree limbs attempting to catch bats emerging from caves. Juveniles will also eat anoles and tree frogs. Predators include hawks, owls, coyotes, raccoons, and other snakes.



Ratsnakes are excellent climbers.



Because of their generalist habitat requirements and ability to climb, ratsnakes frequently enter homes and structures.

Urban and Suburban Snakes: Ratsnakes can be found in neighborhoods and even small cities, especially if large trees are present. These snakes frequently raid chicken coops in search of eggs, which are swallowed whole. The presence of ratsnakes around a home is an effective and cheap form of rodent control. If they are encountered in a building they can usually be easily picked up and removed. When ratsnakes are encountered on a road or path they typically kink up their body to resemble a fallen branch.

Snake Vocabulary

Generalist: a snake that is able to take advantage of a wide variety of natural communities or consume many different types of prey items.

For More Information:

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