

Southeastern Crowned Snake, Florida Crowned Snake, and Rim Rock Crowned Snake

Tantilla coronata, Tantilla relicta, and Tantilla oolitica

Upland Snake Species Profile



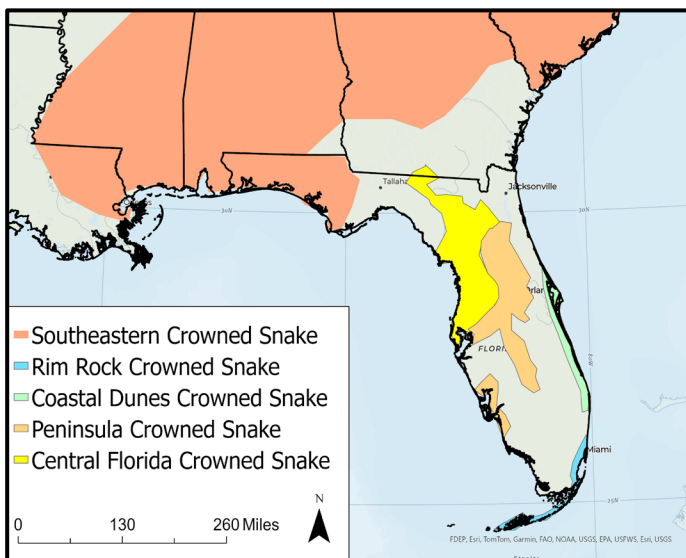
Crowned snakes get their name from the dark “crown” on their head, as seen on this Florida crowned snake.

The Centipede Snake

Crowned snakes, as a group, are also known as “centipede snakes.” They usually have no trouble overpowering these venomous arthropods. However, in 2022, a rim rock crowned snake was found dead after attempting to consume a giant centipede one third its size!

Appearance and Subspecies: All three crowned snake species found in the Southeast have tan bodies with dark, usually black, heads. The tan can range from sand-colored to almost a pinkish hue, especially in Florida crowned snakes. Juveniles have the same pattern as adults. All three species attain a maximum size of 8-10 inches. Southeastern crowned snakes have a pale blotch on each side of the head. Rim-rock crowned snakes have a dark brown to black head. Three subspecies of the Florida crowned snake have been recognized, though each is similar in appearance. Peninsula crowned snakes have a light neck band that is usually four scales wide. Central Florida crowned snakes lack a neck band and the head is narrower. Coastal dunes crowned snakes have a broad, light neck band and a light-tan snout.

Natural History: If you want to see a crowned snake, prepare to put in the time. These fossorial, or subterranean, snakes live secretive lives. Both the Southeastern crowned snake and Florida crowned snake hide beneath logs, rocks, leaf litter, and man-made debris by day. Rim rock crowned snakes prefer to hide beneath chunks of limestone or man-made debris. At night, they hunt down and overpower centipedes and scorpions with a venom that allows them to subdue their also-venomous prey. The crowned snakes of the Southeast all prefer upland habitats, but can be found in everything from rocky glades in the mountains to tropical hardwood hammocks in the Florida Keys. The three species each lay only 1-4 eggs, which hatch in late summer. Crowned snakes appear to have seasonal activity periods, which may be partially tied to soil moisture. However, there is still much to learn about these elusive snakes.



**Upland Snake
Conservation Initiative**

www.gophertortoiseconservation.org

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The Mystery Snake: Are you interested in studying snakes? Crowned snakes would make an excellent study subject. Herpetologists know very little about even basic aspects of crowned snake biology. Understanding their habits and, particularly, their habitat preferences could help to save species such as the rim rock crowned snake.



Southeastern crowned snakes have a pale blotch behind their eye and, like all crowned snakes, a dark "crown" atop their head. Photo by Jake Zadik

To Burn or Not to Burn? Crowned snakes in the Southeast are considered upland snakes, and usually occupy areas that would have historically burned. At a micro-scale, though, these snakes prefer to live beneath cover such as leaf litter and fallen logs. Naturally, burns would have left pockets of unburned habitat where these snakes could reside. Land managers that mimic these natural burn patterns help to ensure the survival of these snakes and many other species.

Crowned snakes possess venom, but are not dangerous to humans. They do not bite and their fangs are too small to puncture human skin anyway!



Tropical hardwood hammock habitat with exposed oolitic limestone is the preferred habitat of rim rock crowned snakes.

Fossorial snakes, like the crowned snake, live almost exclusively underground.

Conservation Challenges: Rim rock crowned snakes were proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act in 2022. Many populations have vanished due to habitat destruction and lowered water tables. Climate change presents a significant threat to the species. The coastal dunes crowned snake occupies habitat preferred by developers and has undoubtedly lost major swaths of its habitat. Other crowned snake species and subspecies remain stable, but have likely seen their ranges shrink substantially as development increases throughout their range.

For More Information:

Krysko, K. L. and K. M. Enge. 2019. Pp 502-508, in K. L. Krysko, K. M. Enge, and P. E. Moler (Eds.). *Amphibians and Reptiles of Florida*. University of Florida Press, Gainesville, FL.

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