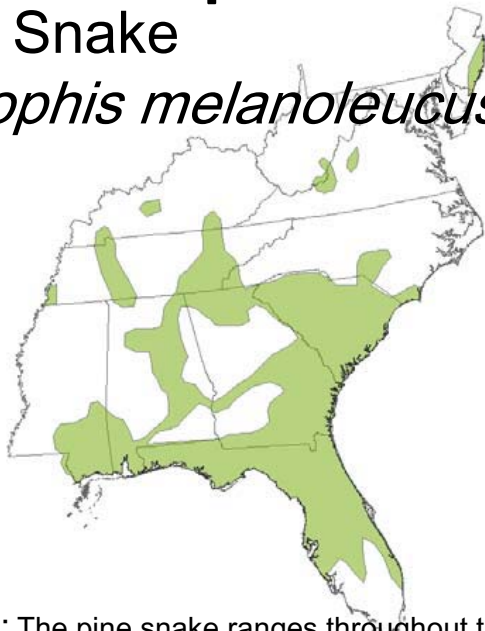


Upland Snake Species Profile:

Pine Snake

Pituophis melanoleucus



Range: The pine snake ranges throughout the southeast, and three subspecies are recognized. The northern pine snake, *P. m. melanoleucus*, resides within the coastal plains of North Carolina, South Carolina, western Virginia, eastern West Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, southern Kentucky and the Pine Barrens of New Jersey. The black pine snake, *P. m. lodingi*, can be found in southwestern Alabama to southeastern Louisiana. The Florida pine snake, *P. m. mugitus*, inhabits southwestern South Carolina to Alabama and south through Florida, reaching the southernmost limit of its range near Lee and Dade counties. The range map shown is for all subspecies.

Identification: Pine snakes may be recognized by their slightly pointed snout, relatively small heads and large bodies. Adult individuals are approximately 140 cm (55 inches) and may hiss loudly when disturbed. Northern pine snakes are distinguished by dark (black) blotches towards the front of the body and brown blotches nearer the tail. The belly is typically a dull color, such as white or grey. Florida pine snakes appear similar to northern pine snakes, but may be lighter in color. The black pine snake is completely black or brown, although some blotchy patterning may be discernible.

Natural History: Adept burrowers, pine snakes spend much of their time underground, occasionally residing within tunnels excavated by mammals. This species is active during the day and may be sighted within mixed pine and oak woods and sand hills, among other habitats. Females often lay eggs in more open areas and may nest communally. Pine snakes have a diverse diet, but are thought to feed primarily on small mammals and are in turn, preyed on by raccoons and foxes. Its unusual defensive behavior includes loud hissing and multiple strikes.



Photo: L. Smith

Conservation: Population estimates are difficult since the species spends much of its time below ground, but they are known to be declining throughout the southeast. Habitat destruction may play a key role in these declines, although road mortality, overcollection and predation by cats and dogs contribute to their rare status. Pine snakes may also have a close association with pocket gophers and live in their burrows. Pocket gophers are however, becoming very rare. Since pine snake populations are considered to be declining, they are typically protected on the state level. The species has been designated as threatened in Kentucky and Tennessee and endangered in Mississippi, while North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, West Virginia and New Jersey consider it imperiled or a species of special concern.

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.

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