

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

GLOSSY SNAKE

Arizona elegans

Family: COLUBRIDAE
R056

Order: SQUAMATA

Class: REPTILIA

Written by: S. Morey
Reviewed by: T. Papenfuss
Edited by: R. Duke

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

This snake is common throughout southern California especially in desert regions. Less common to the north, glossy snakes occur in the interior Coast Ranges as far as Mount Diablo in Contra Costa Co. Glossy snakes are most common in desert habitats but also occur in chaparral, sagebrush, valley-foothill hardwood, pine-juniper, and annual grass. Elevation from below sea level to 1830 m (6,000 ft).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Glossy snakes feed on a variety of desert lizards including juvenile desert iguanas (Cunningham 1959), and zebra-tailed lizards (Vitt and Ohmart 1977). They are listed as probable predators of side-blotched lizards by Ferguson et al. (1982). Captive individuals have been observed to eat young mice and small birds (Stebbins 1954).

Cover: Primarily nocturnal, glossy snakes spend periods of inactivity during the day and during winter in mammal burrows and rock outcrops, and to a lesser extent under surface objects such as flat rocks and vegetation residue. Individuals occasionally burrow in loose soil.

Reproduction: Eggs are laid a few centimeters below the surface in loose soil, under surface objects or near the base of vegetation, or in abandoned mammal burrows.

Water: No information on water requirements. Glossy snakes are most common in arid regions. Standing water is not an important habitat element.

Pattern: Prefer open sandy areas with scattered brush, but also found in rocky areas.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Although some diurnal activity has been reported, glossy snakes are most active at night. Individuals are most commonly encountered in May and June in the south. In the interior Coast Ranges another activity peak occurs prior to the first rains of fall. Periods of winter inactivity occur at all localities.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Predictable seasonal movements have not been reported for this species in California.

Home Range: The nature of the home range in this species is unknown.

Territory: No evidence for the territorial defense of resources has been reported.

Reproduction: Eggs are probably laid in early July. Clutch sizes range from 3 to 23 (mean

8 or 9). Hatching occurs from late August to mid-September (Stebbins 1954, Aldridge 1979). Mating probably occurs in the spring soon after the end of the period of winter inactivity.

Niche: Glossy snakes may be taken by mammals, owls, and other snakes. The nature of competitive interactions with other species of snakes is unknown. The diet of glossy snakes overlaps to some extent with that of several species of desert snakes.

REFERENCES

- Aldridge, R. D. 1979. Female reproductive cycles of the snakes *Arizona elegans* and *Crotalus viridis*. *Herpetologica* 35:256-261.
- Cunningham, J. D. 1959. Reproduction and food of some California snakes. *Herpetologica* 15:17-19.
- Dixon, J. R., and R. R. Fleet. 1976. *Arizona, A. elegans*. *Cat. Am. Amphibians and Reptiles* 179.
- Ferguson, G. W., K. L. Brown, and V. C. DeMarco. 1982. Selective basis for the evolution of variable egg and clutch size in some iguanid lizards. *Herpetologica* 38:178-188.
- Klauber, L. M. 1946. The glossy snake, *Arizona*, with descriptions of new subspecies. *Trans. San Diego. Soc. Nat. Hist.* 10:311-398.
- Stebbins, R. C. 1954. *Amphibians and reptiles of western North America*. McGraw-Hill, New York. 536pp.
- Vitt, L. J., and R. D. Ohmart. 1977. Ecology and reproduction of lower Colorado River lizards: I. *Callisaurus draconoides* (Iguanidae). *Herpetologica* 33:214-222.
- Vitt, L. J., and R. D. Ohmart. 1977. Ecology and reproduction of lower Colorado River lizards: II. *Cnemidophorus tigris* (Teiidae), with comparisons. *Herpetologica* 33:223-234.

R056

Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. *California's Wildlife*. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.