

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

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WESTERN BLACK-HEADED SNAKE

*Tantilla planiceps*

Family: COLUBRIDAE

Order: SQUAMATA

Class: REPTILIA

R068

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

This secretive and little-known snake is probably more common than the few records from most localities indicate. It is known from widely scattered locations in the inner Coast Ranges from San Joaquin and Alameda cos. southward, the Transverse Ranges, and it may occur in the Sierra Nevada foothills and adjacent valley floor north to northern Tulare Co. In southern California, black-headed snakes are widespread, generally west of arid desert regions (several desert records from Inyo, Riverside, San Bernardino and San Diego cos. do exist) and absent from higher mountains. Important habitats include annual grass, valley-foothill types, mixed chaparral, chamise-redshank chaparral, pine juniper, and desert scrub. Elevation sea level to 1830 m (6000 ft)

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** The few records available indicate a preference for invertebrate prey. Black-headed snakes are known to have eaten millipedes, centipedes, and spiders. Captive specimens have eaten mealworms (beetle larvae) and earthworms (Stebbins 1954).

**Cover:** This fossorial and crevice-dwelling species seeks cover during the day and during other periods of inactivity in crevices in rocky outcrops, especially near dry streambeds. Individuals are occasionally encountered under flat rocks and other surface objects.

**Reproduction:** Habitat requirements for mating and egg-laying are unknown. Eggs are probably laid in crevices in stable talus or other rocky accumulations, in loose moist soil, rotting logs, or in abandoned mammal burrows.

**Water:** No information on water requirements. Easterla (1975) found that *T. rubra* in Texas was most active on warm nights following rains. Standing water does not appear to be an important habitat element.

**Pattern:** A snake of moist niches within otherwise arid or semi-arid habitats.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Nocturnal. This species is active on warm nights from spring through early fall. A period of winter inactivity occurs at all localities.

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

**Home Range:** Unknown.

Territory: Not thought to be territorial. Several individuals are occasionally found together under the same rock or log.

Reproduction: Clutch size 1 or 2 (perhaps up to 4). The timing of egg laying and other reproductive events is unknown.

Niche: Unknown. Microhabitat (crevices) and food (arthropods) preferences may minimize competition with other snake species.

## REFERENCES

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