

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

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SMITH'S BLACK-HEADED SNAKE

*Tantilla hobartsmithi*

Family: COLUBRIDAE  
R069

Order: SQUAMATA

Class: REPTILIA

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#### DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE AND SEASONALITY

Smith's black-headed snake is an uncommon species found in California in Inyo, San Bernardino, Kings and Tulare cos. Recently redescribed (Cole and Hardy 1981), the species may be more widespread and common but few data are available. May also be present in Kern and Fresno cos., but there are no verified records. Elsewhere, the species ranges patchily throughout the southwest and into Mexico. These secretive, fossorial snakes are found in a variety of arid habitats, including desert riparian, pine-juniper, sagebrush, alkali scrub, Joshua tree and perennial grass. Ranges up to 1440 m (4750 ft) in the Kingston Mts, San Bernardino Co. (Stebbins 1954, Banta 1960, Cole and Hardy 1981, 1983).

#### SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

**Feeding:** The few records available indicate a preference for invertebrate prey. Beetle larvae, and centipedes have been reported (Minton 1959). Millipedes, spiders and other invertebrates are probably taken as well.

**Cover:** Fossorial. Friable, organic or sandy soil probably required. The species is often found under loose boards, logs, wood, rocks and fallen shrubs.

**Reproduction:** Habitat requirements are unknown. Eggs are probably laid in crevices, rotting logs, or abandoned mammal burrows.

**Water:** No data. More common near water sources.

**Pattern:** Prefers moist niches in otherwise arid or semi-arid habitats, with debris, and friable soil.

#### SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

**Activity Patterns:** Yearlong, probably nocturnal activity. Specimens have been collected throughout the year (Cole and Hardy 1981), but the species may have periods of relative inactivity. Other black-headed snakes are inactive in winter.

**Seasonal Movements/Migration:** No known seasonal movements.

**Home Range:** No data.

**Territory:** No data.

**Reproduction:** Oviparous. Timing of reproduction is unknown, but Minton (1959) and Easterla (1975) report eggs laid June-August in Texas. Clutch is apparently a single large

egg, ranging in size from approximately 4 X 17 mm (0.2 X 0.7 in) for 2 specimens in California (Stebbins 1954) to 7 X 28 mm (0.3 X 1.1 in) for an egg in Texas (Easterla 1975).

Niche: No records of predation on the species in nature (Cole and Hardy 1981). Vitt and Hulse (1973) reported that the Sonoran coral snake will eat *Tantilla planiceps* in captivity.

Comments: The genus *Tantilla* has been subject to a series of recent revisions (Tanner 1966, Cole and Hardy 1981). Originally described by Taylor (1936) from Sonora, Mexico, this species was thereafter usually considered synonymous with *T. atriceps*. Cole and Hardy (1981) revised the genus, based largely on the anatomy of the hemipenes. The literature regarding the genus is, therefore, somewhat confused. Cole and Hardy (1981) provide a brief taxonomic history. The specific epithet honors Dr. Hobart M. Smith.

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