

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

DESERT NIGHTSNAKE
Family: COLUBRIDAE
R071

Hypsiglena chlorophaea
Order: SQUAMATA

Class: REPTILIA

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

The desert nightsnake is locally common in suitable habitat in southern California deserts and from isolated localities in northern Siskiyou and eastern Modoc Co., although nightsnakes probably range throughout much of arid northeastern California. Found in a variety of desert shrub habitats. Elevation sea level to 1920 m (7000 ft). The species has been split and is now considered separate from *H. ochrorhyncha*,

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: The saliva of this snake is mildly venomous, which may help them secure small prey, especially lizards and occasional amphibians (Stebbins 1954).

Cover: When not active this snake seeks cover in crevices in rocky outcrops, under surface objects, and in mammal burrows. The subterranean tendencies of this snake are evidenced by its being found occasionally by roadbuilding crews.

Reproduction: The eggs of this species are laid in crevices in rocky accumulations. Abandoned mammal burrows may also occasionally be utilized as nest sites.

Water: No information on water requirements. This is a snake of arid regions and is often found far from standing water, which is not considered to be an important habitat element.

Pattern: Nightsnakes are most commonly associated with rocky areas or rock outcrops in a variety of habitats.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Nocturnal and crepuscular, night snakes are almost never encountered abroad during the day. Periods of inactivity during cold weather occur at all localities.

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

Home Range: The nature of the home range of nightsnakes is unknown.

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

Reproduction: Eggs are laid in June and July. Females deposit 3 to 9 (usually 4) eggs, which hatch in about two months.

Niche: Nightsnakes are probably taken as prey by owls, nocturnal mammals, and other snakes. The nature of their competitive relationships with other species is not well understood.

REFERENCES

- Clark, D. R., Jr., and C. S. Lieb. 1973. Notes on reproduction in the night snake (*Hypsiglena torquata*). Southwest. Nat. 18:248-252.
- Stebbins, R. C. 1954. Amphibians and reptiles of western North America. McGraw-Hill, New York. 536pp.

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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 Depart. of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.