

PINESNAKE

Pituophis melanoleucus

Order: Squamata
Family: Colubridae
FNAI Ranks: G4/S3
U.S. Status: none
FL Status: Threatened



Description: The typical eastern pinesnake measures between 48-66 inches in total length. They are stout-bodied snakes, with a cream, yellow or white back with a series of irregular black, reddish brown, or dark tan blotches. This pattern is most distinct along the snake's hind parts, while the belly and underside of tail are unmarked. Some individuals may lack this pattern and appear light-colored, whereas others may appear nearly all black. The scales on this snake are strongly keeled, and the snout is elongated. When threatened, this snake can produce a distinctive loud "hiss," likened to air escaping a truck tire. Typically however, this snake will flee for shelter if possible. This species requires dry sandy soils for burrowing and are most often found in open pine-turkey oak woodlands, scrub sandhills and longleaf pine forests. This snake can easily be confused with a juvenile eastern ratsnake, gray ratsnake, or eastern coachwhip.

Similar Species: Most Florida snakes have only two prefrontal scales, and the rostral scale does not split the two internasals. Blotches of red rat snakes (*Elaphe guttata*) are smaller, more numerous (nearly 40), and more distinct. Eastern coachwhip (*Masticophis flagellum*) is more slender, usually darker anteriorly, lacks blotches, and has smooth scales and divided anal scale.

Habitat: Habitats with relatively open canopies and dry sandy soils, in which it burrows. Especially sandhill and former sandhill, including oldfields and pastures, but also sand pine scrub and scrubby flatwoods. Often coexists with pocket gophers and gopher tortoises.

Seasonal Occurrence: Spends most of time below ground; occasional surface activity from spring through fall, especially May - October. Eggs laid June - August; hatch in September and October.

Florida Distribution: Overall a nearly statewide distribution within appropriate habitat, but rare south of Lake Okeechobee. Occurs from Escambia County east to Duval County, and south to Charlotte County on the Gulf coast and Miami-Dade County on the Atlantic coast.

Range-wide Distribution: Southern South Carolina, southern Georgia, and most of Florida.

Conservation Status: Occurs on many state and federal lands in Florida. Threats include collection for pets (now restricted); highway mortality; and habitat loss and fragmentation from development, intensive agriculture, and mining.

Protection and Management: Maintain open characteristic of habitat through use of prescribed fire. Avoid wholesale conversion of natural and semi-natural xeric upland habitats. Assure viability of syntopic pocket gopher (*Geomys*) populations.

References: Ashton and Ashton 1988b, Conant and Collins 1991, Ernst and Barbour 1989, Franz 1986, Moler (ed.) 1992, Mount 1975, Tenant 1997.



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