



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Sacramento Fish & Wildlife Office
Species Account
ALAMEDA WHIPSNAKE
Masticophis lateralis euryxanthus



CLASSIFICATION: Threatened
Federal Register 62:64306; December 5, 1997
http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/federal_register/fr3183.pdf

CRITICAL HABITAT: Designated
Federal Register [71:58175](#). October 2, 2006.

RECOVERY PLAN: Draft
Draft Recovery Plan for Chaparral and Scrub Community Species East of San Francisco Bay, California. March 20, 2003
http://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery_plans/2003/030407.pdf

DESCRIPTION



Drawing by Miriam Morrill

The Alameda whipsnake (*Masticophis lateralis euryxanthus*) is a member of the family Colubridae, which includes most of the species of snakes found in the western United States. It is a slender, fast-moving, diurnally active snake with a slender neck, broad head and large eyes. Another common name for the Alameda whipsnake is the "Alameda striped racer."

Adults reach a length of 3 to 4 feet (91 to 122 centimeters). Their back is colored sooty black or dark brown with a distinct yellow-orange stripe down each side. The front part of their underside is orange-rufous colored. The midsection is cream colored. The rear section and tail are pinkish.

The Alameda whipsnake is one of two subspecies of *Masticophis lateralis*. The other subspecies, the chaparral whipsnake (*Masticophis lateralis lateralis*), is distributed from northern California, west of the Sierran crest and desert, to central Baja California.

The Alameda subspecies is distinguished from the more common chaparral whipsnake by a sooty black back area, wider yellow-orange stripes that run laterally down each side, the lack of a dark line across the scale near the tip of the nose, an uninterrupted light stripe between the tip of the nose and eye, and the virtual absence of spotting on the underside of the head and neck.

This extremely fast-moving snake holds its head high off the ground to peer over grass or rocks for potential prey. It is an active daytime predator. Rock outcrops are an important feature of Alameda whipsnake habitat because they provide retreat opportunities for whipsnakes and promote lizard populations. Lizards, especially the western fence lizard (*Sceloporus*

occidentalis), appear to be the most important prey item of whipsnakes, although other prey items are taken, including skinks, frogs, snakes and birds.

Adult snakes appear to have a bimodal seasonal activity pattern with a large peak during the spring mating season and a smaller peak during late summer and early fall. Although short above-ground movements may occur during the winter, Alameda whipsnakes generally retreat in November into a hibernaculum (shelter used during the snake's dormancy period) and emerge in March.

Courtship and mating occur from late-March through mid-June. During this time, males move around throughout their home ranges, while females appear to remain at or near their hibernaculum, where mating occurs.

Alameda whipsnakes are typically found in chaparral—northern coastal sage scrub and coastal sage. Recent telemetry data indicate that, although home ranges of Alameda whipsnakes are centered on shrub communities, they venture up to 500 feet into adjacent habitats, including grassland, oak savanna, and occasionally oak-bay woodland.

Telemetry data indicate that whipsnakes remain in grasslands for periods ranging from a few hours to several weeks at a time. Grassland habitats are used by male whipsnakes most extensively during the mating season in spring. Female whipsnakes use grassland areas most extensively after mating, possibly in their search for suitable egg-laying sites.

The only evidence of Alameda whipsnake egg-laying is within a grassland community adjacent to a chaparral community. This egg-laying occurred within a few feet of scrub on ungrazed grassland interspersed with lots of scattered shrubs. At two sites, gravid females have been found in scrub.

Core areas (areas of concentrated use) of the Alameda whipsnake most commonly occur on east, south, southeast, and southwest facing slopes. However, recent information indicates that whipsnakes do make use of north facing slopes in more open stands of scrub habitat.

DISTRIBUTION

The Alameda whipsnake currently inhabits the inner coast range mostly in Contra Costa and Alameda counties, with additional occurrence records in San Joaquin and Santa Clara counties.

The current distribution of the subspecies has been reduced to five separate areas with little or no interchange due to habitat loss, alteration, and fragmentation:

1. Sobrante Ridge, Tilden/Wildcat Regional Parks to the Briones Hills, in Contra Costa County (Tilden-Briones population)
2. Oakland Hills, Anthony Chabot area to Las Trampas Ridge, in Contra Costa County (Oakland-Las Trampas population)
3. Hayward Hills, Palomares area to Pleasanton Ridge, in Alameda County (Hayward-Pleasanton Ridge population)
4. Mount Diablo vicinity and the Black Hills, in Contra Costa County (Mount Diablo-Black Hills population)
5. Wauhab Ridge, Del Valle area to the Cedar Mountain Ridge, in (Sunol-Cedar Mountain population).

Compared to the much more common chaparral whipsnake, the Alameda subspecies' historic range has always had a very restricted distribution. It most likely included all of the coastal scrub and oak woodland communities in the East Bay in Contra Costa, Alameda, and parts of San Joaquin and Santa Clara counties.

THREATS

Current threats to Alameda whipsnake habitat are urban development and associated impacts that result from increased human population densities, fire suppression and resulting likelihood of catastrophic wildfires, increased predation pressure, and incompatible grazing practices.

REFERENCES FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Note There is a special Alameda whipsnake species account for 4th, 5th and 6th grade students.
http://www.fws.gov/sacramento/es/animal_spp_acct/alameda_whipsnake_kf.htm

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