

SINOLOAN MILK SNAKE

(Species: *Lampropeltis triangulum*; Family: Colubridae)

The milk snake is a species of king snake. There are around 25 subspecies among the milk snakes including the scarlet kingsnake. The subspecies have strikingly different appearance and many of them have their own common names. They are found from Canada to Ecuador and will grow to 24 to 36 inches long.

Some milk snakes have a striking resemblance to coral snakes and this mimicry (known as Batesian mimicry) likely scares away potential predators. While both milk snakes and coral snakes possess transverse bands of red, black, and yellow, a common mnemonic can be used to properly distinguish between the deadly coral snake and the harmless milk snake:

- Red on black, poison lack; red on yellow kill a fellow
- Red to yellow, kill a fellow; red to black, venom lack
- Red and yellow, kill a fellow; red and black, friend of Jack.
- Red next to black is a friend of Jack; red next to yellow will kill a fellow

However, the eastern milk snake does not resemble a coral snake; instead it tends to have similar markings to that of several other snakes, particularly the fox snake and the copperhead. There is enough distinction to make the eastern milk snake fairly easy to identify.

RANGE: In Mexico, Sonora to Sinaloa into southwestern Chihuahua. Possibly the very-southern-most part of Arizona.

HABITAT: Pacific coastal lowlands below 3300 feet, abundant around edges of cornfields. Likes to burrow.

LIFE HISTORY: Can grow to 48 inches. Lifespan is 10-15 years, maximum 20 years. Mature at 2 years. Mates from early May to late June. The sperm can be stored for up to 1 year. The female lays 3 to 24 eggs beneath rotting wood, boards, rocks, and rotting vegetation. Incubation is 58 to 76 days.

NATURAL DIET: Much more opportunistic eaters than the fox snake or corn snake. They have been known to consume variety of animals including rodents, eggs, birds, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates. Nevertheless, the diet of an adult milk snake will primarily consist of rodents. They are nocturnal eaters and are often found during the day in old barns and under wood. Like other members of the king snake family, the milk snakes sometimes eat other snakes and do have at least some immunity to their venom.

MYTHS: A common myth about milk snakes is that they suck cows udders to get milk. The myth is entirely false. The milk snake does not have the physical capabilities to suck milk out of cows. Milk snakes are, however, frequently found in and around barns, making use of their cool and dark environments and for the easily-accessed populations of rodents to feed on. This proximity to barns, and therefore cows, gave rise to the myth.