

desert
wildlife
services



Desert Wildlife Services, Inc.

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GOPHER SNAKE

General

While most of our calls are for Western diamondback rattlesnakes, the reptile in question often turns out to be a gopher snake.

Gopher snakes are very common throughout Pima County and Tucson. We find them in just about every type of habitat imaginable, including rural, suburban and urban areas. To say they are adaptable would be putting things mildly.

While harmless to humans and most pets, these snakes are often perceived as a threat. This is likely due to their large size, resemblance to rattlesnakes, and the simple fact that they are indeed, a snake.

As mentioned, gopher snakes are present in a great variety of habitats. It is not uncommon for them to appear in urban gardens, carports, storage sheds, pool and spa areas, woodpiles and even inside homes.

Gopher Snake Description and Notes

The gopher snake is a large, heavy-bodied snake. It can reach lengths of over 8 feet.

In Tucson and Pima County, Desert Wildlife Services rarely encounters specimens of much massive length. Most of the gopher snakes that we encounter are between 3' and 4' long, but it is not uncommon for us to remove several 5'-6' gopher snakes over the course of a year. The pictured gopher snake above (center picture) is approximately 6'.

Colors vary, but most of our local gopher snakes are of a mustard yellowish to cream-colored nature, with black, brown or reddish brown patterns existing on the top and sides of



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the body. These patterns often look like crude rectangles, hexagons or diamonds. Patterns often change along the length of the snake's body and especially along the tail. Some or part of the tail region often becomes a pattern of blackish or black "rings" interspaced by the above mentioned mustard yellowish color.

When threatened, gopher snakes will sometimes flatten their head, hiss loudly and vibrate their tail. This behavior often causes alarm with human observers, tricking them into believing a rattlesnake is in their presence.

Gopher snakes are active during the day and night, but during hot periods of the year, they are most active during the night.

Gopher snakes are very good climbers and feed on rodents, birds, bird eggs, lizards, rabbits and most anything else that they can handle. They kill their prey by constriction.



This gopher snake found its way into a client's home through a dryer vent on the outside wall. After entering the home, it attempted to enter the dryer, but became stuck while doing so. With some soapy water and a lot of patience, we extracted the "appliance bound" gopher snake and later released it in a more appropriate location.



Females lay 2 - 25 eggs in one or two clutches per year, generally from June through August.

Spanish names relevant to this snake:
cincuate, chirrionera