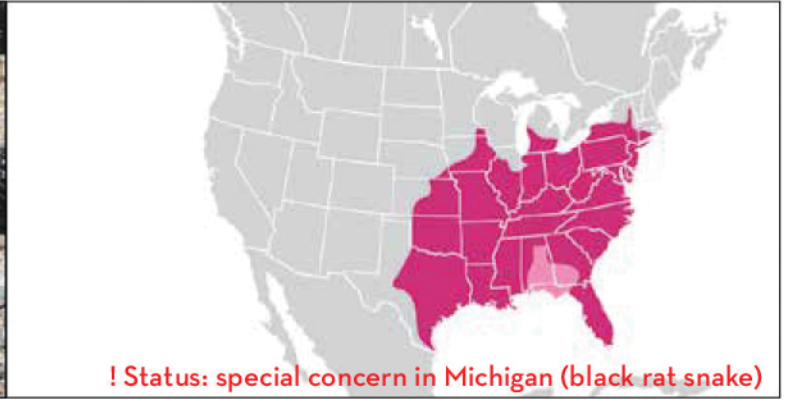


RAT SNAKE

updated March 2017



Range	Rat snakes are found from New England south through Florida and west through the eastern halves of Texas and Nebraska and north again to southern Wisconsin. Black rat snakes (<i>E. o. obsoleta</i>) are the most widely distributed; gray rat snakes (<i>E. o. spiloides</i>) range from southern Georgia and northern Florida west through Mississippi and north to southern Kentucky
Habitat	Rocky hillsides of mountains to flat farmland; they are excellent climbers and will spend a lot of time in trees
Diet (wild)	Primarily known as rodent eaters; juveniles will eat lizards and occasional small frogs
Diet (captive)	Dead rodents
Description	Length: 42–72 inches. Powerful slender body with a wedge-shaped head and keeled scales. Black rat snakes, as the name states, are completely black except for their white chin; hatchlings have a pale gray background with black blotches along its back. Gray rat snakes keep the blotched juvenile pattern their entire life; the blotches will vary between dark gray and brown. Juvenile black rat snakes are often mistaken for small gray rat snakes.
Lifespan	20–25 years
Reproduction	Five weeks after mating, the female lays 12–20 eggs in a hidden area under hollow logs or leaves or in abandoned burrows. The eggs hatch 65–70 days later. Hatchlings are vigorous eaters and will double their size rather quickly. If conditions are good, females will sometimes produce two clutches a year. Males will begin to seek out a mate typically in late April, May, and early June.
Behavior	Rat snakes are active during the day in spring and fall, and nocturnal during summer to avoid heat of the day. They tend to be shy and, if possible, will avoid being confronted. If rat snakes are confronted by danger, they tend to freeze and remain motionless. Rat snakes will sometimes coil their body and vibrate their tails in dead leaves to simulate a rattle. If they continue to get provoked, rat snakes will strike. Rat snakes will also release a foul-smelling musk if they are picked up.
Our animals	Black rat snake: 1 male. Arrived at PPZ in 06/2003 (private donation) Gray rat snake: 1 male. Arrived: 06/2003 (private donation)
Cool stuff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rat snakes are excellent climbers and will capture birds and raid nests for eggs. • Rat snakes are very useful around barns and farms. These snakes should be welcome because they help control the pest population. • Rat snakes (<i>Pantherophis obsoletus</i>) come in a variety of subspecies. Seven subspecies occur in the United States, with colors ranging from black and gray, to orange, yellow, tan and some striped. Almost all subspecies are bred in captivity.

Phylum
ChordataClass
ReptiliaOrder
SquamataFamily
ColubridaeGenus
Pantherophisspecies
P. obsoletus