

# Pacific Gopher Snake

*Pituophis catenifer catenifer*

Reptile

## Scientific Name

*Pituophis catenifer catenifer*

## Other Names

Bull Snake

## Range

Northern California north of Santa Barbara into Oregon

## Habitat

Grasslands, woodlands, coniferous forests, farmland, chaparral, marshes, and riparian lowlands

## Average Size

Length: 2 ½ - 7 ft

Weight: 2 – 4 lbs.

## Description

A large snake with heavily keeled scales, a narrow head that is slightly wider than the neck, and a protruding rostral scale on the tip of the snout. Ground color is straw or tan, with large dark chocolate blotches or saddles along the back and smaller gray spots on the sides.

## Lifespan

In the wild: Estimated at 10 years

In captivity: 12 – 15 years

## Diet

In the wild: Small mammals, birds, eggs, amphibians and insects

In captivity: Mice

## Incubation

10 weeks

## Sexual Maturity

3 – 4 years

## Clutch Size

12 – 14 eggs

## Predators

Hawks, small mammals and humans

## Population Status

Stable



## Behavior

The Pacific Gopher Snake is one of the more common snakes found in California. They are diurnal, active in the daytime, but in the heat of the summer become more nocturnal in their hunting patterns. Although mostly terrestrial, they are excellent climbers and swimmers like most snakes. When threatened, the Pacific Gopher Snake mimics the behavior of a rattlesnake. It will inflate its body, flatten its head, produce a loud hiss, and move its tail back and forth rapidly in the dry vegetation to produce a rattling sound.

Gopher snakes actively hunt for their prey, both on the ground and in trees, and can go extended periods of time without eating. In winter, they hibernate under the ground, sometimes in communal dens with other snakes.

## Reproduction and Breeding

Breeding season begins in early spring, with males competing actively for females and territories. Males will often perform combat dances with each other that involve hissing, head rearing and intertwining that is often confused with a mating ritual between a male and female. Rarely is biting involved. This ritual is a means of determining sexual fitness of a male, as generally only the victor will mate with nearby females.

The female will lay her eggs in an abandoned mammal burrow and provide no further parental care. Females may produce more than one clutch per year.

## Conservation

Although Pacific Gopher Snakes are common in most parts of their range and are prized in many agricultural areas for their natural pest control, they are still threatened with habitat loss and persecution by humans. Many gopher snakes meet an unfortunate end when they are confused with the venomous rattlesnake. The Sacramento Zoo houses a Pacific Gopher Snake with a rattlesnake so visitors can become familiar with the differences between these two, native snakes.



The Sacramento Zoological Society  
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### Amazing Facts

There are eight recognized subspecies of this snake!

They are closely related to Rat Snakes and King Snakes and have been known to interbreed in the wild!

Gopher snakes are often referred to as Bull Snakes, which is commonly thought to be another species of gopher snake found east of the Rocky Mountains!

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