

# **GREAT BASIN GOPHER SNAKE**

The Great Basin Gopher Snake's scientific name is *Pituophis cantenifer deserticola*. This snake is a non-venomous member of the Colubridae family.

## **Physical description:**

A full grown Great Basin Gopher Snake averages about 70 – 200cm long. They are light brown or yellowish-brown in color with dark brown or black squares running from head to tail. Their under belly is a creamy color with irregular small dark blotches. The snake has the three distinct markings on its head:

- Horizontal band between eyes
- Vertical line running from below the eye to the upper jaw
- Angled strip running from yet to angle of jaw.

## **Reproduction**

The Great Basin Gopher Snake mates in May, ovulates in June, and deposits its eggs in late June and early July. A female lays two to eight eggs in abandoned rodent burrows, sand substrates, flat areas, or south facing slopes. These nests contain the eggs of several females of the same and different species. The eggs' incubation period is 60 - 80 days, hatching in late August and early September.

## **Life expectancy**

The Great Basin Gopher Snake lifespan is about 10 – 14 years.

## **Habitat**

The Great Basin Gopher Snake lives mainly in Western North America. It can be found in these specific locations:

- In Canada: the BC southern interior
- In the United States: Washington, Oregon, Colorado, Nevada, Wyoming, Arizona, California, and New Mexico to name a few states.

They most often live in dry sandy areas, scrub, pine woodlands, plains, abandoned fields, and deserts, but they also favor cultivated fields, grass, and brush. In BC the Gopher Snake lives in dry grassland valleys.

## **Hibernation**

The Great Basin Gopher Snake hibernates through the months from November to March. They hibernate in areas with many snakes of the same and different species.

## **Diet**

In general, regardless of geographic region, Great Basin Gopher Snake feeds on rodents and birds. In BC's south Okanogan, 91% of their diet consists of small rodents, voles, pocket mice, and deer mice; the remaining 9% consists of young birds (page 3, Bertram). In California, they feed on various mammals and birds, such as mice, kangaroo rats, gophers, ground squirrels, rabbits, quail and ducks and their eggs, and lizards.

They search burrows, shrubs, and climb trees to reach bird's nests, and like boa constrictors, Great Basin Gophers strangle (constrict) their prey before eating.

This snake has proved valuable to farmers, as they are a means of pest control for rodents.

## **Communication**

To indicate that they feel threatened, the Great Basin Gopher Snake will hiss loudly and rattle its tail; this behavior often leads people to mistakenly identify the snake as a rattle snake.

## **Threats and preservation**

In general, the Great Basin Gopher Snake is not an endangered species, but its main enemies are man, large birds of prey (e.g., hawks, owls, and eagles), and other snakes (some but not all). Its main habit threats from man include urbanization of rural areas, agriculture, and cattle grazing.

“The Wildlife Act of British Columbia prohibits the collection, handling, and trade of all native wildlife species without a permit; but does not provide habitat protection.”

([http://www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca/search/speciesDetails\\_e.cfm?SpeciesID=722](http://www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca/search/speciesDetails_e.cfm?SpeciesID=722))

## **Website references:**

<http://jlpuhn.tripod.com/Snakes/gopher.html>

<http://chaoscat.lowerground.net/herps/pituophis/gbgopher/>

<http://www.hoglezoo.org/animals/view.php?id=55>

<http://www.death-valley.us/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=89>

<http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/sir/fwh/wld/atlas/species/gopher.html>

[http://www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca/search/speciesDetails\\_e.cfm?SpeciesID=722](http://www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca/search/speciesDetails_e.cfm?SpeciesID=722)

## **Book references:**

Bertram, Nadine, "Great Basin" Gopher snake, 2004 (cannot find website reference through a Google search)

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