



## Pacific Gophersnake

The background color of the Pacific gophersnake is glossy yellow to buff with black, brown, or reddish-brown blotches on the back. The scales are keeled and the tail pointed. Its general coloration and behavior mimic a rattlesnake, but the Pacific gophersnake is harmless. This snake is a good climber and burrower. It lays an average of 6-7 eggs in the spring to early summer, with the young hatching in about 70 days.

**Length:** 36-100 inches.

**Habitat:** They are found in many different habitats throughout California including blue oak, gray pine, and oak woodlands. Pacific gophersnakes are also found in chaparral, grassland, and riparian areas.

**Food:** They eat small mammals, birds, bird eggs, and lizards. These snakes often inhabit the same burrows as their prey.

**The Pacific gophersnake is often mistaken for a rattlesnake and killed.**



## Northern Pacific Rattlesnake

The general coloration of the northern Pacific rattlesnake varies, usually matching the background soil color, with brown or black dorsal blotches. The head is broad, flat, and triangular with facial pits and vertically oriented, elliptical eye pupils. The skin is dull with keeled scales. The tail, tapering with a “rattle,” is made up of interlocking pieces of dry skin. This snake is most active in spring or fall, in morning and evening or at night in warm weather, and is live-bearing with an average of 4-12 young born September to October.

**Length:** 15-62 inches.

**Habitat:** Rattlesnakes are found in a variety of habitats from coastal sand dunes to timberline. They prefer rock outcrops in annual grasslands, chaparral, blue oak, gray pine, and oak woodlands.

**Food:** They eat small mammals, birds, and lizards.



# East Bay Regional Park District

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**On the cover:** Pacific ring-necked snake.  
Snake photos courtesy Gary Nafis



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# Common Snakes in the East Bay Regional Park District



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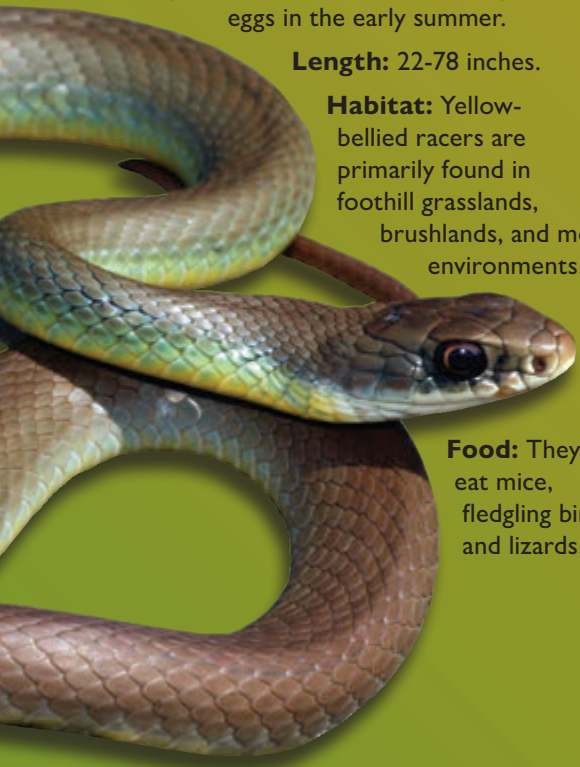
## Western Yellow-bellied Racer

The western yellow-bellied racer has large eyes and a long slender body which is olive-green, blue-gray, or tan on top with a yellow belly. This snake is extremely fast, which is essential for capturing certain prey. The young resemble small gopher snakes except for their large eyes and shiny, smooth scales. This snake lays 12-24 eggs in the early summer.

**Length:** 22-78 inches.

**Habitat:** Yellow-bellied racers are primarily found in foothill grasslands, brushlands, and moist environments.

**Food:** They eat mice, fledgling birds, and lizards.



## Diablo Range Gartersnake

The coloration of the Diablo range gartersnake varies greatly depending upon the subspecies. The back is usually blotched brown to black with a dorsal stripe. This snake is live-bearing with 7-25 young born late summer to fall.

**Length:** 18-57 inches.

**Habitat:** Primarily aquatic, they are found in and along streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes from coastal brackish marshes to the high mountains.

**Food:** They eat fish, frogs, salamanders, and mice. This snake is one of the few that can eat the highly toxic California newt.



## Coast Gartersnake

The coloration of the coast gartersnake varies greatly depending upon the subspecies. The subspecies in the East Bay has a bright yellow stripe down the middle of the back. Bright red or orange flecks or blotches usually present on belly and sides, including side stripes. The scales are keeled. This snake is live-bearing with 4-19 young born July to September.



**Length:** 18-42 inches.

**Habitat:** Coast gartersnake are found throughout Northern California, the Sierra Nevada, and east of the Sierra Nevada. They prefer areas along streams, among bushes, damp meadows, clearings, and chaparral with permanent water.

**Food:** They eat tadpoles, frogs, fish, small mammals, and occasionally birds.

## Northern Rubber Boa

The northern rubber boa is a stout-bodied snake that looks and feels like rubber. Sometimes called the "two-headed snake" because its tail is shaped somewhat like its head. It has shiny, smooth skin that can be brown to olive green on top and yellow to cream below. It is usually active at dawn and dusk, but in the spring it is occasionally active during the day. The northern rubber boa is live-bearing with 2-8 young born August to November.



**Length:** 14-30 inches.

**Habitat:** They are found in moist grassland, woodland, and forested areas in and beneath rotting logs and where leaf litter and duff are on the ground. They burrow, swim, and climb.

**Food:** They eat small mammals, insects, and lizards.

## California Mountain Kingsnake

The California mountain kingsnake is a colorful, shiny snake with black, red, and white bands and a black snout. This snake is harmless, but is often mistaken for the poisonous coral snake, which is not found in California. Its temperament is a bit nervous and defensive. It mates from April to May and lays 4-8 eggs in the summer.



**Length:** 20-40 inches.

**Habitat:** It lives in moist, cool canyons of mountainous regions of California, in coniferous forests, and woodlands mixed with chaparral. This is a very rare snake in the Park District.

**Food:** They eat lizards, small snakes, small animals, and bird eggs.

## Alameda Whipsnake

The Alameda whipsnake is a slender, fast-moving, plain black, or dark brown snake with a conspicuous yellow or orange stripe down each side. It is listed as threatened by the California Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It lays an average of 6 eggs in the summer.



**Length:** 30-60 inches.

**Habitat:** The whipsnake is usually found in grassland, coastal scrub, or chaparral close to a water source. At present, this subspecies' range is limited to Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

**Food:** They eat rodents, small birds, other snakes, and their primary prey, fence lizards.

## California Kingsnake

The California kingsnake has conspicuous alternating bands of black or dark brown with white or cream. The scales are smooth and shiny. They lay 6-12 eggs in early summer.

**Length:** 30-82 inches.

**Habitat:** California kingsnakes are found under logs, lumber, and rock outcrops in a variety of habitats throughout California. These habitats include forests, chaparral, grasslands, river bottoms, and deserts.

**Food:** They eat other snakes (including rattlesnakes), lizards, birds, bird eggs, and mice.

**The California kingsnake, handled here by an East Bay Regional Park District naturalist, is becoming increasingly rare in the Bay Area and should be left alone when encountered.**

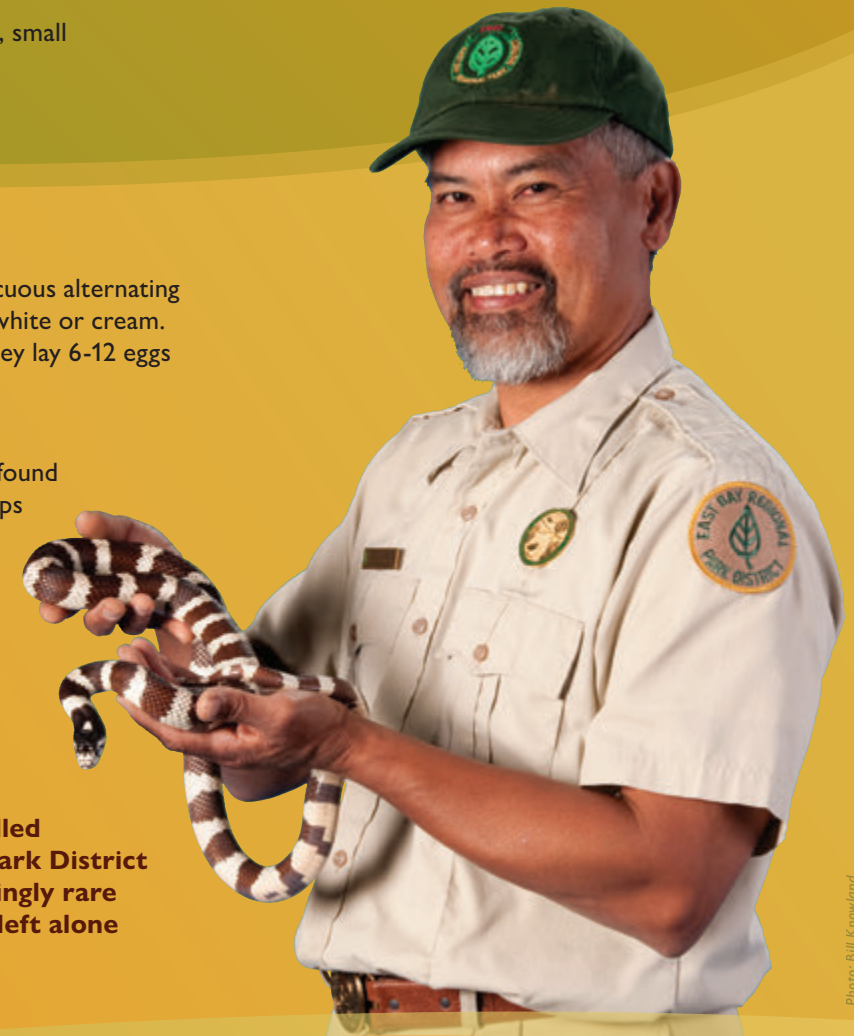


Photo: Bill Knowland



## Pacific Ring-necked Snake

The Pacific ring-necked snake is a small, slender snake with a topline that is olive, brownish, blue-gray, or nearly black. It has a neck band that can be yellow, orange, or cream. The underside is red-orange with black dots and the red intensifies on the underside of the tail. It lays 4-6 eggs in late spring.

**Length:** 12-30 inches.

**Habitat:** Ring-neck snakes prefer moist soil on north-facing slopes of foothill canyons, grassland, chaparral, and riparian areas.

**Food:** They eat mainly slender salamanders, but also small tree frogs, lizards, earthworms, and insects.

## About Snake Skin

A snake's scaly skin is an incredible natural innovation, beautiful, supple and strong. It helps the snake move smoothly along the ground, through the grass, in and out of holes, and even up into tall trees. A snake can do all of this with no arms or legs for help. A snake's skin can also be a kind of flexible armor, to protect the snake from cuts, or bites from other animals, but still stretchy enough to allow for a giant meal.



**Gartersnake with newly shed skin.**

It helps the snake stay dry in wet weather, and keeps it from drying out in the summer. It can display brilliant colors, or hide a snake with a perfect blotchy camouflage. Amazingly, a snake's scales are part of its skin, as are the durable but clear "spectacles" covering its eyes. That's why, when a snake sheds, all the scales come off together, even the eye coverings, to reveal a perfect fresh skin and clear bright eyes underneath!

Photo: Doug Webster - naturepl.com