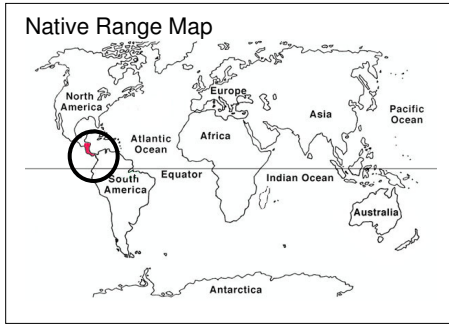


Honduran Milk Snake



Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Subphylum: Vertebrata
Class: Reptilia
Order: Squamata
Family: Colubridae
Genus: *Lampropeltis*
Species: *triangulum hondurensis*



Photo courtesy of Karen Marzynski

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** This milk snake species is found in low to mid-elevation rainforest leaf litter in Honduras, Nicaragua, and portions of northeast Costa Rica.
- **Exhibit Location:** Zoo to You Collection

Characteristics

- Adult specimens of the Honduran milk snake often reach 4 feet and sometimes exceed 6 feet in length. Their average weight is about 2.8 pounds.
- They are tri-colored with bold rings of white/yellow, black, and red/orange that may or may not extend onto the belly and completely encircle the snake. The thin tail sounds like a rattlesnake when they shake their tail quickly in leaf litter.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** 15 years; **In Captivity** 20+ years

Behaviors

- This species is harmless and non-venomous. It leads a solitary life, and is rarely seen in the open during the day. It is often seen crossing roads at night. They are nocturnal (active at night) in summer and diurnal (active in the daytime) in spring and fall.
- Its favorite hunting ground is around barns and other human locales. They burrow through loose leaf litter hunting for prey. It kills by constricting (squeezing) its prey.
- Hibernation occurs from late October or early November until April or May.
- Milk snakes do not bask openly and are frequently discovered under an object that is in direct sunlight, absorbing heat from the object's underside.
- When threatened, they will flee; but if cornered, they will hold their ground and raise the head to strike. They use quick, jerky movements so that their bands flash, startling predators. Their bright colors signal danger.
- These snakes are known for their imitation of the markings and behavior of the venomous coral snake.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** none

Reproduction

- Sexual maturity is reached by the age of 18 months. Most mating occurs in May. Females seem to gather at communal egg-laying sites in early June. It is not known why they do this. It is suspected that it may be due to a lack of suitable nesting sites, rather than for social reasons.
- The female lays 3-18 leathery-shelled eggs beneath rocks, in decaying plants or rotting logs, compost and manure piles, under boards, and in loose soil. The incubation period is 10 weeks. Hatchlings are large and robust and should start eating after their first shed, which occurs anywhere from 5-10 days from leaving the egg.
- Like many reptiles, the incubation temperature of their eggs determines the sex of the young (warmer = males; cooler = females).

Diet

- **In the Wild:** small mammals such as voles, mice, and rats, birds, lizards, other snakes

- **At the Zoo:** mice

Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** not listed; **CITES Appendix:** not listed; they are common in their native habitat.
- Two greatest causes for decline in their population are likely road mortality and deliberate killing by humans who believe they are dangerous. Habitat loss will eventually affect their numbers also.
- Predators: birds of prey, wild felids, humans (imitates the brightly colored banding of local venomous coral snakes and therefore gain protection from predators)

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- The milk snake's name originates from the incorrect belief that they drank milk from the udders of cows because they were often seen in barns and stables. In reality, they were hunting rodents, commonly found in those structures.
- Milk snakes in general have one of the widest distributions of any snake in the Americas.

Sources:

- Busch Entertainment Corporation, (n.d.). Honduran milksnake. Retrieved Nov. 05, 2005, from SeaWorld/Busch Gardens ANIMALS Web site: <http://www.seaworld.org/animal-info/animal-bytes/animalia/eumetazoa/coelomates/deuterostomes/chordata/craniata/reptilia/squamata/honduran-milksnake.htm>.
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- The Melbourne Zoo, (2004). Honduran milk snake. Retrieved Oct. 22, 2005, from Melbourne Zoo Web site: http://www.zoo.org.au/animal_page.cfm?area_id=25&zoo_id=1&animal_id=137.