



unknown photographer, © California Academy of Science

common name	Gopher Snake
scientific names	<i>Pituophis melanoleucus</i>
phylum	Chordata
class	Reptilia
order	Squamata
family	Colubridae
habitat	grasslands, farm fields and brush fields
size	0.8 to 1.8 meters

description The Gopher Snake is yellowish brown, with dark, diamond-shaped markings. They can grow very large, often over 2 meters in length..

fun facts When disturbed or attacked by a predator, a Gopher Snake will often flatten its head (making it look wider), hiss loudly, and shake its tail very fast. What kind of snake do you think it might be trying to imitate?

life cycle Female Gopher Snakes lay between 3-18 eggs (usually 7 or 8) in the early summer. Eggs are usually laid below ground in [mammal](#) burrows or moist, loose soil. Baby snakes [emerge](#) in the fall..

ecology The Gopher Snake is very common in California and can be found in many habitat types. Like the California Kingsnake, the Gopher Snake is a constrictor, which squeezes its prey in order to kill it. They feed on mammals, birds, and occasionally lizards.

Gopher Snakes, like many other snakes, play an important role in controlling rodent populations. Rodents are mammals such as voles, pocket gophers, ground squirrels and mice. Think about the effects on the vernal pool grassland food web if the number of Gopher Snakes became much smaller?

conservation Some people kill snakes out of ignorance because they think snakes are bad or they are afraid that the snakes might hurt them. They do not realize that snakes are even more afraid of humans than we are of them! Although some snakes will strike if they feel threatened, they tend to slither away when they feel the vibration of our footsteps coming toward them. To avoid scaring a snake, all

you have to do is make sure they know you are coming. They should be left alone, unharmed.

investigate

Because they look similar, Gopher Snakes are often mistaken for Rattlesnakes. Using a reptile field guide, other books or a search of the Internet, find a photograph or drawing of a species of rattlesnake that lives in our area. Compare its appearance to that of a Gopher Snake. Would you be fooled by the Gopher Snake's disguise?

Discuss the Gopher Snake with a classmate who is studying the California Kingsnake. Do you think the Kingsnake would be afraid to eat a Gopher Snake? Why?

