
UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS
MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

SPECIAL PUBLICATION NO. 5

December 14, 1979

**THE NATURAL HISTORY OF
MEXICAN RATTLESNAKES**

By **BARRY L. ARMSTRONG**
Research Associate

and

JAMES B. MURPHY
Curator

*Department of Herpetology
Dallas Zoo
621 East Clarendon Drive
Dallas, Texas 75203*

UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS
LAWRENCE
1979

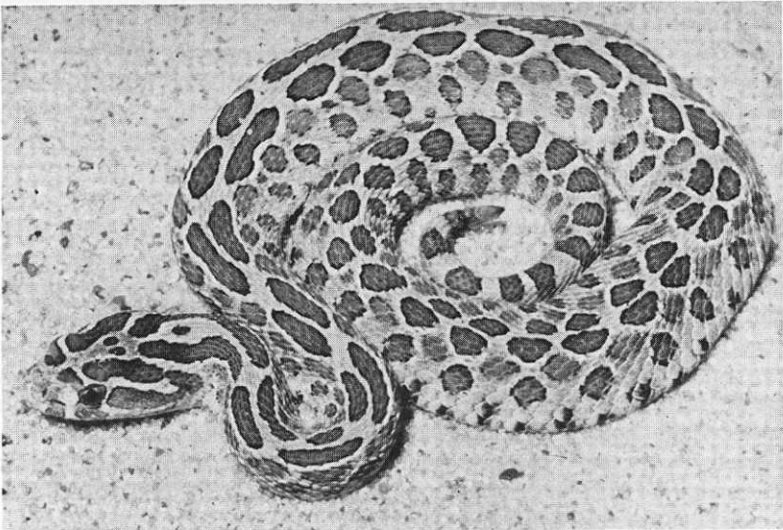


FIG. 20. *Crotalus polystictus*. Juvenile specimen born to female collected at Rancho San Francisco, Jalisco, Mexico. (Photograph by John H. Tashjian.)



FIG. 21. Habitat of *Crotalus polystictus*. Rancho San Francisco, Jalisco, Mexico. Snakes were commonly found among boulders or in gopher burrows in grassy meadows with surrounding pine forest on hillsides. (Photograph by M. Granger.)

collected in mesquite grassland (Duellman 1965: 655). This area has rocky outcrops where the species is easily located. We have also collected this species in plains-grassland areas, although it does not appear to be abundant in this environment.

Crotalus polystictus is found rather commonly in late spring when summer rains have not yet been sufficiently heavy to contribute to growth of grass cover. During this period, they become somewhat nocturnal, active individuals having been recorded as late as 2200 hours. In late spring, *C. polystictus* displays a rather mild disposition and is usually quite inoffensive. Some specimens have been observed attempting to hide their heads beneath a coil of their body, behavior similar to that exhibited by *Lichanura trivirgata roseofusca*. During the summer, this species becomes much more aggressive and will generally not retreat when approached. We observed an individual which, upon discovery, opened its mouth in a threatening pose similar to the behavior exhibited by *Agkistrodon piscivorus*. *Lampropeltis triangulum arcifera*, a harmless colubrid snake, is common in the vicinity of the Nevado de Colima, and may be an important predator upon these rattlesnakes.

The known range of *C. polystictus* is decreasing due to habitat destruction. The plateados inhabited by these rattlesnakes are being altered for agricultural use because they are more easily cleared than adjacent pine-oak forests.

The preferred habitat of *C. polystictus* is Temperate Pine-Oak Forest as defined by Leopold (1950), and Mesquite Grassland (Duellman 1965).

Cuesta Terron (1930-31) reported on a brood of 14 newborn young whose average total length was 12 cm, a figure considerably smaller than the mean total length of broods measured by us. It is possible that Cuesta Terron may have misidentified his snakes (see Fig. 6, p. 54), although we have not seen his specimens.

Data are available to us for six broods born to females of this species, as follows: Female A, weighing 111 g and measuring 608 mm total length (575 mm S-V), gave birth to ten young on 20 June 1974: total length 200-223 mm, mean 211; S-V 184-208 mm, mean 195; weight 6.3-10.9 g, mean 7.2. Female B, weighing 166 g and measuring 660 mm total length (620 mm S-V), gave birth to twelve young on 13 June 1974: total length 211-287 mm, mean 222; S-V 198-271 mm, mean 208; weight 8.5-11.5 g, mean 9.9. Female C gave birth to seven young on 26 June 1975: total length 198-232 mm, mean 216; S-V 185-211 mm, mean 200; weight 9.9-10.5 g, mean 10.1. Female D gave birth to seven neonates on 30 June 1975: total length 182-205 mm, mean 197; S-V 167-185 mm, mean 179; weight 9.9-11.1 g, mean 10.6. Female E gave birth to five stillborn young on 30 June 1975: total length 155-203 mm, mean