

The Utah Mountain Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis pyromelana* *infralabialis*) in Arizona (Tanner, 1953)¹

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The Utah Mountain kingsnake is a handsome mountain dweller which occurs in Arizona, Utah and extreme southeastern Nevada, where it is confined to a few canyons in the Egan, Snake and Shell Creek Ranges (Stebbins, 2003). Distribution is spotty throughout its range (K. Crowther, pers. comm.)

In Arizona, the Utah Mountain kingsnake is restricted to north of the Colorado River on the Arizona Strip District in Coconino and Mohave Counties. There are several

records from the North Rim Grand Canyon National Park. (A.T. Holycross, pers. comm) Wright & Wright (1957) have a photo of a specimen reportedly from Jacob's Lake on the north end of the Kaibab Plateau. It is probable that this specimen was collected not at Jacob Lake but at the north rim of the Grand Canyon. Jacob Lake is the only outpost on the Kaibab Plateau and consequently, a significant landmark. Records of this subspecies outside the Kaibab Plateau were previously limited to two specimens from Mt. Trumbull collected by W.C. Sherbrooke (UAZ 14653, UAZ 14654). The author has two records from northeastern Mohave Co. which extends the known range of this subspecies in northern Arizona (Stebbins, 2003).

Field Notes

August 1, 1992. Black Rock Mountain. Mohave Co., AZ. Elevation: 7,200'. The Bureau of Land Management dispatch phoned me today. She said that the fire crew had a mountain kingsnake for me. I left the house thinking that they probably had a *Rhinocheilus*. I found my friend Tom Lund and 2 other firefighters waiting for me at the cabin. They had stored their find in an empty water cooler. I pulled off the lid and to my surprise, there was a juvenile *infralabialis* less than 2' in length. It was gorgeous with rich orange bands. It did not attempt to bite when handled and made an excellent

captive, readily taking newborn mice. I retained the specimen long enough to obtain a cast skin. Our State Herpetologist requested the specimen be sent to Phoenix to be preserved and deposited in the University of Arizona collection. I mailed him the cast skin and released the mountain kingsnake near where it was captured. The habitat is Ponderosa pine. Photo voucher UAZ 19840.

April 19, 2001. Poverty Mountain, Mohave Co., AZ. Elevation: 6,040. I was assisting Dan Carpenter, a graduate student from Brigham Young University to look for Great Basin rattlesnakes *Crotalus viridis lutosus* on Poverty Mountain. In addition to aiding Carpenter to obtain blood samples from Arizona Strip populations of *lutosus*, I was hoping to find a *Crotalus molossus*. By

1:30 PM, the temperatures had fallen into the low 70's and a cool wind was starting to pick up. We still had not found a *lutosus*. I worked my way up to the top of the rim of a nearly vertical rock face. A slight movement in a rock fissure caught my eye, a movement that I first took for grass swaying in the breeze. I lifted a piece of cap rock and

to my amazement, loosely coiled underneath was an adult *Lampropeltis pyromelana infralabialis*, approximately 30" in length. It made a feeble effort to escape. Had it made a more serious dash for the stack of boulders below, it would have been impossible to extricate. It has numerous red bands obscured by black. All interest in Crotalids ceased at this point and Dan and I turned our attention to locating more *infralabialis*, although no more were seen that day. The specimen was photographed and released beneath the rock where it was discovered. The habitat is pinyon-juniper. There are no nearby sources of natural water. Photo voucher UAZ 25161.



Figure 1.
Utah Mountain kingsnake
(*Lampropeltis pyromelana*
infralabialis)
Photo by:
Breck Bartholomew

¹A description of the subspecies *Lampropeltis pyromelana infralabialis* was first published by Tanner in 1953. Tanner recognized 4 color patterns or subspecies:

L. pyromelana infralabialis, *L. pyromelana knoblochi*, *L. pyromelana pyromelana* and *L. pyromelana woodini*. (Wright & Wright, 1957). Tanner based the classification of the Utah Mountain kingsnake on the 9 lower labial scales in *infralabialis* compared to 10 in *p. pyromelana* and the 50 percent or more white rings extending unbroken across the belly (*infralabialis*) versus 50 percent or less of the white rings extending unbroken across the belly (*p. pyromelana*). Recently, Crowther (unpublished data) examined several Utah specimens and reported that nearly all had the distinctive labial scale count. A taxonomic review of *Lampropeltis pyromelana*

may determine the subspecies *infralabialis* to be invalid. Until then, this subspecies is still recognized as per Crother, et al. (2000).

Bibliography

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a few photos my lantern fell over into the scene startling the snakes. The Nightsnake released the Sandsnake and they crawled off in different directions. The Sandsnake was bleeding from wounds on its head and neck.

Nightsnakes feed primarily on lizards and squamate eggs, but occasionally prey on other snakes (Rodríguez-Robles *et al.* Copeia 1999:93-100). This is the first record of predation on Variable Sandsnake. Although neither snake was measured or weighed, figures 1 – 3 suggest that had the Sandsnake been eaten, relative prey mass would have exceeded the 0.50 maximum reported for Nightsnakes (Rodríguez-Robles *et al.* 1999. *op. cit.*).

sn.

HYP SIGLENA TORQUATA
(Nightsnake) DIET.

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At 1845 h on 4 May 2000 near the summit of South Mountain (Maricopa County, Arizona) near National Trail (UTM 12 404295E 3690324N, 670 m elev.) I observed an adult Nightsnake attempting to prey upon an adult Variable Sandsnake (*Chilomeniscus stramineus*). I happened upon the snakes as they were writhing and struggling near the edge of a gravelly wash high on the mountain. The Nightsnake had a firm grasp on the Sandsnake's head. It appeared that the Nightsnake was attempting to bend the neck of, and constrict the Sandsnake. I propped my lantern near the scene so that I could take photos (Fig. 1-6). Unfortunately, after taking



Figures 2 and 3. Nightsnake (*H. torquata*) attempting predation of a Variable Sandsnake (*Chilomeniscus stramineus*)
Photo by Thomas Brennan

Figure 1. Nightsnake (*H. torquata*) attempting predation of a Variable Sandsnake (*Chilomeniscus stramineus*)
Photo by Thomas Brennan

