Heterodon nasicus

Scientific Classification

Kingdom:	Anamalia
Phylum:	Cordata
Class:	Reptilia
Order:	Squamata
Suborder:	Serpentes
Family:	Serpentes
Geunus	Coludridae
Subgenus:	***H. nasicus***

Binomial Name

Heterodon nasicus
Baird & Girard, 1852

"Bluffers" redirects here. For other uses, see Bluffers (disambiguation)

The **western hognose snake** (*Heterodon nasicus*) is a species of nonvenomous snake in the family Colubridae. The species is endemic to North America.

Etymology

The specific name, *nasicus*, is from the Latin *nasus* ("nose"), in reference to the upturned snout.[2]

The subspecific name, *gloydi*, is in honor of American herpetologist Howard K. Gloyd (1902-1978).[3]

The subspecific (or specific) name, *kennerlyi*, is in honor of American naturalist Caleb Burwell Rowan Kennerly (1829-1861).[3]

Common names

Common names for *Heterodon nasicus* include blow snake, bluffer, faux viper, plains hog-nosed snake, prairie hognose snake, spoonbill snake, spreadhead snake, Texas hognose snake, Texas rooter, and western hognose snake.

Taxonomy

Some authors elevate *H. n. kennerlyi*, also known as the Mexican hognose snake, to species level. Those same authors have subsumed *H. n. gloydi* into *H. nasicus* so that there are only two species (*H. nasicus* and *H. kennerlyi*) and no subspecies.[*citation needed*]

Description

The western hognose snake is a relatively small, stout-bodied snake. Its color and pattern is highly variable between subspecies, although most specimens appear much like rattlesnakes to the untrained eye, which appears to be Batesian Mimicry. Males are considerably smaller than females, with adults rarely exceeding a total length (including tail) of 15–20 inches (38–51 cm) . This snake gets its common name, "hognose", from the modified rostral (nose) scale that is formed in an upturned manner, providing a very "hog-like" look. Additionally, this adaptation makes these snakes adept burrowers.[4]

The species is nonvenomous, but possesses a potentially irritating saliva that may cause symptoms like negligible to localized slight swelling and itching. The extremely rare bite from this rear-fanged snake is not regarded as of medical importance to humans.[5]

In captivity, the species has been bred into about 52 different "designer" color morphs.[6]

Distribution and habitat

The western hognose snake occurs from southern Canada throughout the United States to northern Mexico. It frequents areas with sandy or gravelly soils, including prairies, river floodplains, scrub and grasslands, semi-deserts, and some semiagricultural areas.[1] It has been found at elevations of up to 2500 m.[5]

Ecology

Behavior

The western hognose snake is primarily diurnal. It is typically a docile snake (though known to be highly defensive in some individuals). If threatened (or perceiving a threat), it may flatten its neck (much like a cobra), hiss, and make 'mock' or 'bluff' strikes if harassed, which are strikes made at an intruder but with the snakes' mouth closed. Subsequently, even when further harassed, western hognose snakes virtually never bite as a self defense mechanism, but will instead usually resort to playing dead.[7][8] Although it is more common that it will flatten its head, some individuals may puff up, filling the throat with air. This is more common with adolescent males.

Diet

In the wild, the western hognose snake feeds predominately on amphibians, such as large and medium-sized tree frogs, as well as small or medium-sized toads and small lizards. There have been accounts of *H. nasicus* eating the occasional rodent in the wild as well. Not being a true constrictor, *Heterodon* bites and chews, driving the rear fangs into the prey as a way of introducing the saliva to help break down the toxins from toads. There have been many cases of hognose snakes in captivity that will not eat for about two to three-and-a-half months, from the months January to mid March. This is because hognose snakes' instinct is to brumate underground during the winter months.[*citation needed*]

Reproduction

Adult western hognose snakes have been observed in copulation as early as February and March. The species is oviparous, with females laying 4-23 elongate, thin-shelled eggs in June–August. The eggs take approximately 60 days to hatch. Each hatchling is 13–23 cm (5–9 inches) in total length, and reaches sexual maturity after approximately two years (this is predominantly based on size, not so much age).[9]

Subspecies

Subspecies[10]	Authority[10]	Common name[10]	Geographic range[4]
H. n. gloydi	Edgren, 1952	Gloyd's hog-nosed snake	United States: southeastern Kansas and southeastern Missouri, eastern Oklahoma and all of Texas excluding the panhandle, trans-pecos Texas and the extreme southern Rio Grande Valley.
H. n. kennerlyi	Kennicott, 1860	Kennerly's hog-nosed snake	Mexico from Tamaulipas and central San Luis Potosí, north and west along the Sierra Madre Occidental, entering the United States in the extreme south of the Rio Grande Valley, trans-pecos Texas, southwestern New Mexico and southeastern Arizona.
H. n. nasicus	Baird & Girard, 1852	Western hog-nosed snake	Texas panhandle and adjacent New Mexico, north through western Oklahoma and Kansasto southwestern Manitoba and southeastern Saskatchewan in Canada. Also occurs in prairie regions of Minnesota and prairie relicts of Illinois.

Conservation

Although some local declines have been reported, the species *H. nasicus* is widespread, has a large overall population size (>100,000), and is effectively protected by a variety of conservation programs. It is therefore currently classified as Least Concern by the IUCN. The eastern hognose snake (*Heterodon platirhinos*) is classified as a threatened species in some regions of its range and is therefore protected under those state's laws.[1]