

Northern Pine Snake, *Pituophis melanoleucus melanoleucus*

Status:

State: Threatened

Federal: Not listed

Identification

The northern pine snake is a relatively large (48-68 in. or 122-172 cm) black and dull white to yellowish or light gray snake. These snakes have blotches that are dark towards the front of the body but may fade to brown near and on the tail. Pine snakes have keeled scales and a single anal plate. Known for their noisy hiss, pine snakes are typically ground dwellers and rarely climb vegetation. Since this species is both secretive and fossorial, meaning it burrows underground, it can easily go undetected even in locations where it is known to be common (Mitchell 1994).



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Habitat

Pine snakes in New Jersey require dry pine-oak forest types growing on very infertile sandy soils such as Lakehurst or Lakewood sands (Burger and Zappalorti 1988, 1989). Both human-caused and natural disturbances (e.g. agriculture, forestry, and fire) are probably involved in creating the types of openings important for nesting and basking. Sandy infertile soil not only provides for persistent openings in disturbed sites, but may also be important because pine snakes are the only snakes known to dig hibernacula and summer dens.

Status and Conservation

The secretive nature of this snake has led to some degree of uncertainty about its overall status in the northeastern United States. All indications seem to suggest that pine snake abundance has decreased throughout its northeastern range, however. It is also believed that pine snakes have been extirpated from West Virginia and Maryland. The New Jersey Pinelands may hold some of the largest populations of pine snakes in the Northeast, but even in the Pinelands this species is at risk.