

The Buzz

Advocates *for* Snake Preservation



Changing how people view & treat snakes

Summer 2019 • #01

Why Snakes?

There are already so many conservation groups, why do snakes need their own?

Like me, you probably grew up hearing stories about snakes, stories that rarely had nice things to say about them. From the biblical tale of the Garden of Eden to the modern story of Harry Potter, snakes are usually portrayed as deceitful and villainous. Real snakes prefer to escape our notice, so myths and fables supply what most people know about them. Consequently, misunderstanding and fear eclipse appreciation of these mysterious and intriguing animals.

And snakes need our help. They haven't escaped the worldwide extinction crisis; climate change, habitat loss, and exploitation threaten many snakes. Like all native wildlife, snakes are an important part of our community and a vibrant, functioning planet. But negative attitudes about snakes may be the biggest barrier to their conservation – it is difficult to gain public support when you aren't perceived as cute and cuddly.

Advocates for Snake Preservation (ASP) is changing the narrative about snakes

Just before founding ASP, Jeff and I worked at a nature preserve full of snakes. Most visitors came for birds or butterflies, but left with a new appreciation for snakes. We introduced a couple who “hoped not to see any snakes during their visit” to Porter, one of our resident black-tailed rattlesnakes, and shared her story with them. They returned from their hike excited to share photos of the “cute snake” they spotted and wanted to learn more. A scout leader who routinely killed any rattlesnake that showed up in his yard decided to reconsider his behavior



A group (extended family?) of Arizona black rattlesnakes (*Crotalus cerberus*) hanging around outside their den.

after learning that rattlesnakes take care of their kids. Stories engage people in a way that simply stating facts and figures do not.

In 2014, we founded ASP to promote compassionate conservation and coexistence with snakes by illustrating cool snake behaviors with multimedia stories. While education and changing attitudes are the heart of ASP's work, we also take action and advocate on issues that can't wait for long-term strategy and continue our research to provide a clearer picture of what snakes are really like.

As we celebrate ASP's fifth anniversary, we are grateful that you are on this journey with us. Without you, we wouldn't have changed the conversation on rattlesnake roundups, killed the Arizona snake-shooting bill, or launched a program to help people coexist with their snake neighbors. **ASP isn't one, two, or three people – it's all of us, working together for a world where snakes are respected and appreciated instead of feared and hated.** And of course we'd be nowhere without the snakes to inspire and remind us what we're fighting for.

- Melissa Amarello, Executive Director, ASP

The Mythical Mohave Green



On the left, how many picture Mohaves. On the right, how we encountered that Mohave, before we disturbed him.

Mohave Greens are notorious for being the nastiest and deadliest snakes in the West. But is the reputation of the Mohave rattlesnake (*Crotalus scutulatus*) deserved? Here are the facts behind common Mohave myths:

Myth: There are rattlesnakes, and then there are Mohave Greens.

Fact: Mohave rattlesnakes are no more dangerous than any of the nearly 50 species of rattlesnake. Mohave greens are just Mohave rattlesnakes with a greenish tint, and are no more toxic or aggressive than any other Mohave. The name is colloquial, and is often mis-applied to other species, such as black-tailed and western diamond-backed rattlesnakes.

Myth: All Mohaves have strongly neurotoxic venom.

Fact: Like other rattlesnakes, the venom of Mohaves is incredibly complex and variable. Many Mohaves produce a potent neurotoxin called Mojave toxin but lack the tissue-destroying components found in many other rattlesnake venoms. However, some Mohaves produce a venom that destroys tissue but lacks Mojave toxin and others produce venom with both components. Many other species, like southern Pacific and canebrake rattlesnakes, have neurotoxins in their venom similar to Mojave toxin. Neurological signs and symptoms following some snakebites have repeatedly prompted naïve medical experts to blame Mohaves in areas far from where Mohaves live.

Myth: There is no treatment for Mohave bites.

Fact: Mohave rattlesnake bites are treatable with the same antivenom and procedure used for other rattlesnakes. Both antivenoms available in US hospitals neutralize Mojave toxin.

Myth: Mohaves are the most deadly rattlesnake.

Fact: Human fatalities from Mohave rattlesnake bites are very rare. The last known fatality was in 2007, likely due to an anaphylactoid reaction. Such reactions are extraordinarily rare and not limited to Mohave bites. The deadly reputation of Mohave rattlesnakes is traceable to venom studies in the lab, where their venom routinely ranks as one of the most lethal to mice. Such studies do not always translate well to humans.

Myth: Mohave rattlesnakes are aggressive, and will attack and chase people.

Fact: Rattlesnakes want nothing to do with people and Mohaves are no different. A large Mohave might weigh two pounds. Now imagine confronting an animal 50-100 times more massive than you. Would you attack? Of course not! You'd be scared to death. First you might try to hide, but if that didn't work, you might try to look and act as big and dangerous as possible. Only as a last resort would you fight — probably kicking, scratching, and biting to get away. Rattlesnakes are no different... except they cannot kick or scratch. Most snakebites happen to people who handle or try to kill a snake. The rest are due to people putting their hands and feet where they can't see or don't look. **Watching where you place your hands and feet and leaving rattlesnakes alone would prevent virtually all rattlesnake bites.**

In our thousands of encounters with Mohaves and other rattlesnakes, we've never observed an attack and have found rattlesnakes to be rather timid creatures. We've seen snakes appear to chase or attack in two situations: a mother protecting her babies or a snake trying to escape to shelter behind us. **These days, everyone has a video camera in their pocket... yet we still await video proof of an unprovoked rattlesnake attack!**

- Michael D. Cardwell, Biologist & Mohave Advocate

- Melissa Amarello, Executive Director, ASP

- Jeffrey J. Smith, Director of Research, ASP



Be a Snake Hero!

Snakes deserve a voice and together we give them one. **Your gift brings us closer to a world where snakes are respected and appreciated instead of feared and hated.** Together we can make it happen.

Name

Address

City

State

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Email

Make your check payable to:
Advocates for Snake Preservation
and send to:

PO Box 2752, Silver City, NM 88062

You can also donate online at:
www.snakes.ngo/donate

Thank You!

We're incredibly lucky to have had many talented artists donate their art to us to promote snake conservation. You're likely familiar with our logo, designed and donated by **Dennis Caldwell** (caldwell-design.com). A couple years ago **Jim Bob Barnett** (jimbobbarnett.com) designed shirts to raise awareness about rattlesnake roundups and donated the profits to us. *Rumor has it he's working on something new.*

We're thrilled to announce two new artist partnerships!



Elizabeth Livingston (etsy.com/shop/KnitsByLizzy) is donating profits from the sales of her hand knit items on Etsy.



Emma Hsiao (emmahsiao.me) is working on several pieces for us, including this depiction of a black-tailed rattlesnake mom and babies. Get stuff featuring Emma's art and more in our new shop:

www.snakes.ngo/shop

Snake Country Survival Guide

Got friends or neighbors who are worried about snakes? The Snake Country Survival Guide is made just for them! It is full of tips on how to safely coexist with all snakes. **Let us know if you'd like some brochures to distribute in your area.**

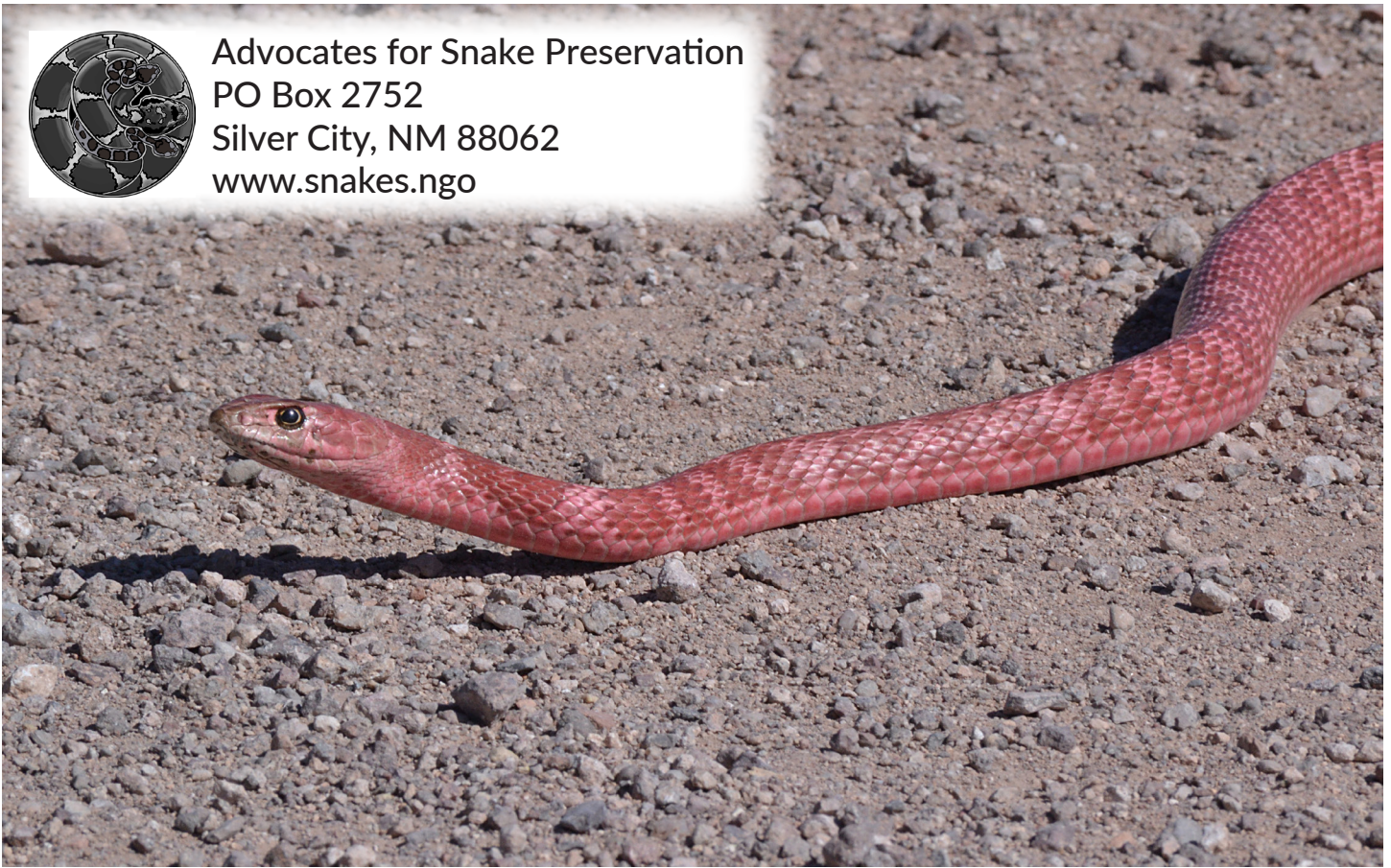
**Snake
Country**
Survival Guide



The information in the guide is applicable throughout the United States, but the photos definitely have a southwest bias. We'd love to make additional regional versions and need your help! If you have photos of the snakes in your area that could be a good fit for the Guide, let us know. Feedback on content is appreciated too. Check out the online version of the Guide at LivingWithSnakes.org.



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Advocates for Snake Preservation

uses science, education, and advocacy to promote compassionate conservation and coexistence with snakes.

Who We Are

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The Buzz is published by
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ASP is a 501c3 organization
that is changing how people
view and treat snakes.

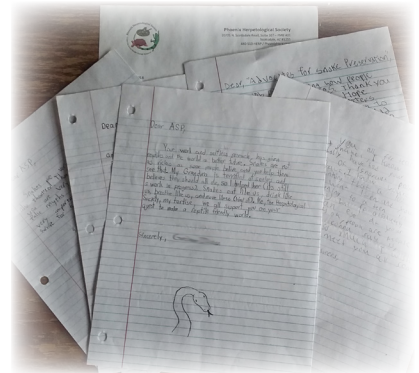
TAKE ACTION

'Tis the season for snakes
to be on the move in the
northern hemisphere,
looking for food and friends.
Their travels often take them
across roads, where many
meet their death.

Slow Down for Snakes!

*And encourage your
friends to do the same.*

If it's safe, you can help
snakes cross in the direction
they're headed. But please
be careful, *especially with
venomous snakes* -- we need
our Snake Heroes alive and
speaking out for snakes!



**"Your work and selfless
research has given reptiles
and the world a better future.
Snakes are not as vicious as
some people believe and you
help them see that."**

Letters from the Phoenix
Herpetological Society's
Summer Campers expressing
their gratitude for
ASP's work.

