

# The Buzz

## Advocates *for* Snake Preservation



Changing how people view & treat snakes

Autumn 2019 • #02

### Lovers and fighters

*The male combat “dance” of snakes – rattlesnakes among them – is an affair wherein the obvious isn’t the truth, and the truth is stranger than the obvious.*

– Laurence Klauber

When we think of combat, graphic images of violent competition come to mind: humans with swords or guns, sheep ramming their heads together, or cats fighting with tooth and claw. Even tortoises, which seem like peaceful creatures, attempt to flip their opponent onto their backs – a potentially lethal sentence.

So venomous snakes, considered by some to be ruthless, cold-blooded killers, must put on quite a show when they fight.

And they do, but it is not the bloody spectacle you might expect. As Klauber said, *“the truth is stranger than the obvious.”*

**Rattlesnake combat is an elaborate wrestling match**, where each male tries to topple the other. Although rattlesnakes are not immune to their own venom, they rarely bite during combat and there is little rattling.

In fact, the contest can be so tranquil that it is often mistaken for courtship between a male and female (courtship dance).

*So how do you differentiate between rattlesnake courtship and combat?*



Rock Rattlesnake courtship.

**Rattlesnakes rarely elevate their head or body during courtship, while this behavior is characteristic of combat.** But the biggest

difference is that it takes two to tango, or combat: both males are active participants. Courtship, on the other hand, involves a lot of action by the male, rubbing his face on the female’s body to get her interested in him and

trying to get his tail positioned correctly, often with little noticeable response from the female.

Rattlesnakes are not territorial: they share dens and nest sites, their home ranges overlap, and outside the breeding season, encounters between male rattlesnakes don’t usually result in a fight. But they do engage in non-violent combat for females.

To see videos of combat and courtship and learn how these behaviors differ in non-venomous snakes, check out: [www.snakes.ngo/lovers-fighters](http://www.snakes.ngo/lovers-fighters)



Jaydin pins Marty in a fight over Persephone (Black-tailed Rattlesnakes).

- Melissa Amarello

## Snakey Gifts

**Back by popular demand:** sustainable snake shirts featuring our logo designed by Dennis Caldwell! Now available in a variety of styles, all made in the USA of organic, sustainable materials.



A Black-tailed Rattlesnake Family is available on shirts too!

All of these items are made to order, so shop early to get your items in time for the holidays! Find all this and more at [www.snakes.ngo/shop](http://www.snakes.ngo/shop).

Stickers, journals, mugs, and more are available in our [Redbubble shop](#) featuring our logo and designs by Emma Hsiao.

You'll also find links in our shop for hand-knit items from [KnitsByLizzy on Etsy](#) and [The Snake Shop](#), both of whom are donating a portion of their profits to ASP.



An Aquatic Gartersnake is one of several species available in Emma's Respect Serpents Series.



Arizona Black Rattlesnake

## Secrets of Snakes: The Science beyond the Myths

The heart of ASP's work is using stories to illustrate cool snake behaviors and busting myths and misconceptions when answering questions about snakes. A few questions seem to pop up again and again:

*"Are rattlesnakes rattling less?"*

*"Are babies more dangerous than adults?"*

*"How do you tell good snakes from bad snakes?"*

David Steen ([@AlongsideWild](#)) also spends much of his time answering snake questions and wrote **Secrets of Snakes** to tackle the most common ones (each of the above examples has its own chapter). **This is the perfect book for anyone interested in learning more about snakes**; a quick and enjoyable read, science-based, but not at all dense. Get more book recommendations at [www.snakes.ngo/books](http://www.snakes.ngo/books).



## Thank You!

**Silver City Food Co-op** for selecting ASP as a recipient for the October 2020 Round-Up program!

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## Advocates for Snake Preservation

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

### Who We Are

Melissa Amarello,  
Executive Director

Jeff Smith, Director of  
Research

Steve Marlatt, Vice-Chair  
of the Board of Directors

**The Buzz** is published by ASP for our supporters. Questions, suggestions, or comments? Contact us at:

[info@snakes.ngo](mailto:info@snakes.ngo)  
[www.snakes.ngo](http://www.snakes.ngo)  
520-333-6957

A few weeks ago at the farmers' market, a little boy ran up and hugged me. At first I thought it was a case of mistaken identity, but then he started asking after Pipsqueak, one of our snake teaching assistants (who usually steals the show). We had visited his classroom at a nearby rural school and made the kind of lasting impression we aim to with our outreach programs: to teach people that snakes aren't bad, there are safe ways to coexist, and that having snakes around us makes our lives richer.

Now that I've made the leap to dedicate myself to ASP full-time, I could assure him that he would see Pipsqueak again very soon. Helping kids fall in love with their snake neighbors is an important step towards changing the prevalent attitude that "the only good snake is a dead snake." ***This work would not be possible without generous supporters like you.***

*Thank you, for all you do for snakes, every day!*

*Melissa Amarello*

Executive Director, ASP



Melissa and Henry, a Western Diamond-Backed Rattlesnake.

## 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'll make it happen.

- \$100** provides a free school or library presentation in New Mexico
- \$50** powers a day of filming snake behavior in the wild
- \$25** distributes 25 *Snake Country Survival Guide* brochures
- \$5** feeds one of our snake teachers for a month
- \$\_\_** Every dollar makes a difference for snakes

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Sonoran Whipsnake

## Tales of Transformation

“Like too many people I was afraid of Snakes. So much so, that when a harmless Gartersnake crawled into my car and I spotted her (while driving!) I panicked and crashed the car. I nearly died and still have residual damage. On the positive side, I awoke from a coma cured of my herpetophobia, realizing that not even a Coralsnake bite would have caused so much lasting damage. It was, therefore, encouraging to finally find an organization, Advocates for Snake Preservation, devoted to educating us – the deeply ignorant majority – on the real nature of Snakes: in fact they are much more beneficial than many animals we readily accept and our fears are irrational, not to say superstitious. This organization is a necessity to dispel myths and help elevate Snakes to their rightful place in the Animal Kingdom. I will definitely keep supporting Advocates for Snake Preservation’s crucial efforts to dispel myths and end acts of vandalism and cruelty against much misunderstood beings.”

- **Dolores Proubasta, Arkansas**



Black-Necked Gartersnake