

# The Buzz

## Advocates *for* Snake Preservation



Changing how people view & treat snakes

Spring 2021 • #06

### Emerging With Care

A snake's scaled snout pokes forth from a crag recess and feels its first direct rays of sun in months. Her body remains in passage, still nearly as cold as the contents of your refrigerator. After months in her dark retreat, her now-warming head, the seat of most information sensing and processing, must be overwhelmed by the bright surface world that is also coming to life. This moment marks the beginning of a new cycle for many temperate-zone snakes that sequester themselves into nooks on the Earth's crust, to be reborn into the swelling energy of spring.

She has been delivered easily across the bleakness of winter by a physiology of profound efficiency, and may emerge with nearly as much heft as when she entered in fall. Her systems have idled: her heart, slowed to perhaps one beat per minute, supplied enough oxygen for tissue survival, but none for growth and digestion. Should an infection take hold, her immune response would compel her to bask opportunistically when the sun shone, but otherwise her movement would be limited to occasional shifting and a mid-storm drink or two at the surface to hydrate. In milder climates, snakes may remain close enough to the surface to bask, but feeding is risky, as the heat required for digestion is not guaranteed and such prey may become bacterial media.



A female Arizona Black Rattlesnake gets her first glimpse of the sun on a warm spring day, photographed by Jeff Smith.

Her eyes now half filled with the expanse of a great broad sky, she remains still as the shadows compact and then lengthen again, until she is convinced no predators loom. She slips outside but does not stray far; it will take time to become accustomed to this inverted world and to re-calibrate to the danger that has sculpted her body and behavior over eons. Heat cues emergence, but it is not the sole priority. Security governs her actions, and she may warm only slightly in the filtered sun beneath a bush or rock. Over days or even weeks, her stillness belies a tide of biochemical and biorhythmic changes unfolding, preparing her for the twin essentials of survival and reproduction.

Though elaborately and colorfully sheathed, her actions and body have been honed by natural selection and streamlined for success. She navigates the world by a constellation of environmental cues that are ephemeral and hard to predict. Certain scents, the degree of herbaceous growth, or the passing shadow of a raptor inform her competing drives for resources and security. Yet even the keenest chemosense and conservative cautiousness cannot avert all risk.

The fabric of the biosphere binds all life together, a principle that, for many of us, had faded with our daily preoccupations.

*Continued inside...*

## Emerging With Care *(continued)*

For many, SARS-CoV-2 rekindled an awareness of nature's web and affected our habits. Staying closer to home, avoiding crowds, spending more time outside and dispensing with unnecessary activity, we now act more like snakes (and other wild creatures) than we have in ages. Paradoxically, our vulnerability to nature has led to an embrace of the same, as avoiding the contagion impels more of us outdoors.

Human cleverness brought us to the moon and back, but our animal bodies will always be best served by focusing on our own neighborhoods and communities that nourish our well-being. Emerging from this long virological winter, each of us has an opportunity to envision and build a more resilient world, one that is attuned both to threats and to our needs. We can protect our neighbors, human and otherwise, by adjusting our behavior and giving them a little space.

- Jeff Smith, Co-founder, Treasurer, ASP



Ring-Necked Snake (*Diadophis punctatus*)

## Help Snakes Every Time You Shop

*What if you could help us change how people view and treat snakes just by donating your spare change?* We've partnered with a new program, The Round Up App, that automatically rounds up your credit or debit card transactions to the nearest dollar and donates the difference to us. Would you be a giver today?

Learn more at: <https://roundup.app/p/snakes>

## 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, Co-founder, Treasurer
- Steve Marlatt, Chair
- Jesús A. Rivas, PhD, Vice-Chair
- Emily Taylor, PhD, Secretary
- Gordon M. Burghardt, PhD, Director

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[info@snakes.ngo](mailto:info@snakes.ngo) • 520-333-6957

## 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.**

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PO Box 2752, Silver City, NM 88062

**You can also donate online at:**

[www.snakes.ngo/donate](http://www.snakes.ngo/donate)

**SPRING. IS. HERE!** All winter I look forward to longer days, warmer weather, and most of all: my first encounter of the year with a sleepy snake, just waking up from his long winter's nap. Nothing makes me happier than watching snakes bask with their friends outside their den, preparing for a busy summer. This spring many of us are also entering a new season. Perhaps we can learn from snakes how to approach this with care – Jeff's article on the cover is a great place to start.

I'm also excited to tell you about our new online series: **Snakes Are Everything!** We launched in a *big* way with *Snakes Are Awesome!* ASP Board Co-chair, Dr. Jesús Rivas, shared so many fun facts and exciting stories about Green Anacondas. If you missed it live, recordings are available on our YouTube channel, where you'll find many other cool, new videos.

*THANK YOU so much, for all you do for snakes, every day!*

*Melissa Annarello*

Executive Director, ASP



Melissa and Henry, a Western Diamond-Backed Rattlesnake.

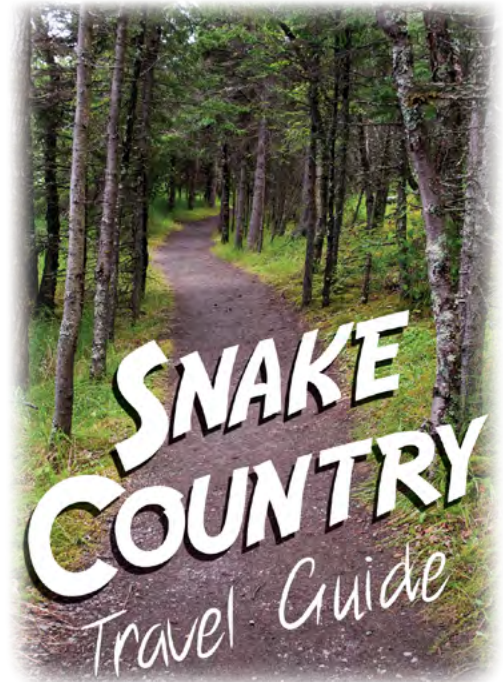
## *Tips for a Safe Snake Season*

**Be aware of your surroundings, and there's no need to beware of snakes.**

Snake season is here, but that's no reason to avoid the outdoors. Enjoy nature, wildlife, and stay safe with these tips:

- Use lights when walking at night.
- Look before placing your hands and feet.
- Observe and enjoy snakes from a safe distance!
- Don't feed or water your pets or wildlife on the ground.
- Don't use glue traps or bird netting – they trap snakes too.
- Create clear, wide paths throughout your yard for safe walking.
- Learn your venomous snake neighbors' habits and avoid their areas.
- Don't approach, handle, move, or kill snakes – most bites happen in these situations!
- If you don't want snakes in your yard, don't create shelter for them or their prey with debris piles.
- Welcome non-venomous snakes, such as Bullsnares and Whipsnares to your yard – they may make it less inviting to venomous snakes.

Snakes are important predators and prey, and their presence indicates a healthy and productive ecosystem. Learn to live with them and appreciate your encounters.



*Does your favorite outdoor recreation area have human-snake conflict problems? This guide teaches how to hike, bike, climb, and camp safely in snake country. **Let us know if you'd like some free brochures to distribute.***

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A female Arizona Black Rattlesnake (*Crotalus cerberus*) emerging from her winter den, photographed by Jeff Smith.

## Snakes Are Everything!



Snakes are **big**. Snakes are *tiny*. Snakes are **fierce**. Snakes are **cute**. There are so many reasons to love snakes and in each episode of **Snakes Are Everything** we'll meet a new Snake Star and learn why snakes inspire their biggest fans.

We'll announce upcoming episodes in our monthly e-newsletter so you can join us live on Facebook or YouTube for the presentation and Q&A. Watch archived episodes at [www.snakes.ngo/everything](http://www.snakes.ngo/everything).

## Thank You!

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Arizona Black Rattlesnakes (*Crotalus cerberus*) basking outside their den.