

The Buzz

Advocates *for* Snake Preservation



Changing how people view & treat snakes

Spring 2022 • #09

Western Patch-nosed Snake Digs for Her Dinner

Have you ever watched a Whiptail Lizard run from you at lightning speed and wondered how anything ever manages to catch and eat them? Well, I'm about to tell you.

One summer afternoon, I noticed a Western Patch-nosed Snake stretched out in the bare soil next to a walking path. She immediately continued on her way, stopping to poke her head into some burrows. Not having anything better to do, I sat down to watch her since she seemed unconcerned with my presence.



Suddenly she made a quick, violent thrust forward into a burrow. Did she catch something?



She quickly pulled out empty-handed, or rather, empty-mouthed. She tried an adjacent hole, immediately withdrawing with nothing, then moved on to the next hole.

SUCCESS!

She pulled out this time with a wiggling Whiptail Lizard. She barely had them by a foot, but was going for it anyway. As she pulled the lizard free of the burrow, she wrapped herself around them and began to kill her prey by constriction.

This was pretty difficult to watch; I love snakes, but I like lizards too. As the *Croc-Hunter* used to say though, "it's nature's way!" So the Patch-nosed got to finish her meal.



After she had swallowed, she wiped her face in the dirt, yawned, and began fishing around in the burrows again. Her behavior was identical to what she was doing when hunting the lizard.

Surely, she CANNOT be hunting for another lizard?!? That was a big meal for her, she can't POSSIBLY hold another.

Or can she?

Within a minute she pulled another Whiptail Lizard from an adjacent burrow! She held this one properly, by the head, so it was over much faster.



Now she was finally done eating. The Patch-nosed slowly crawled up the hill to catch the last bit of sun.

- *Melissa Amarello, Executive Director, ASP*

The Whiptails Strike Back

Around our home, the most commonly seen snakes are Eastern Patch-noseds, the high-elevation sister species of Western Patch-nosed Snakes. Like their lowland cousins, Whiptail Lizards are a staple of their known diet, so we assumed that was what the one we spotted was after as he diligently excavated a burrow in our yard one June evening. Over the course of about an hour, we watched him dig and dig; as the sun set, he gave up for the day, and we watched him knowingly glide over to a leaky cistern for a drink before holing up in a concrete crack for the night.

One week later he (or perhaps a look-alike: Patch-nosed are similar in appearance!) was back, at another soil hole just a couple of body-lengths from his prior work. I left my video camera trained on his operation in hopes of learning later what his quarry might be.

That evening, Melissa and I reviewed the day's footage. He dug tirelessly, flinging soil with his snout and rolling sizable gravel up and out with the side of his head. They are remarkably effective excavators! To our surprise, an adult Whiptail made an appearance at the edge of the frame. What could she be doing? (*The species here is all-female.*) She was perilously close to a predator whose specialty is her own kind! Again and again, she wandered into frame, in apparent interest at the snake's activity (surely she wouldn't mock her pursuer, as Bugs Bunny does Elmer Fudd – *real* animals don't take chances with their predators for laughs!).



Finally, in an act that we (cautiously) attribute to maternal heroism, the Whiptail dashed into the pit to bite the snake while his head was below ground. The strike was so fast that only a couple of video frames record the incident in a blur, and the lizard was gone. The snake was gone, too – he disappeared into the hole, or perhaps used another exit off-frame – but was not seen again in the video.

But we did see the Whiptail again. She dutifully returned to collapse dirt back over the hole created by the Patch-nosed. Such maternal heroics have not been described for most reptiles, and not knowing if this Whiptail's nest was located here relegates our explanation to speculation. What but a mother's care can explain her ferocity in the face of danger?

Whatever the reason for the Whiptail's bravery (and the snake's doggedness!), we will continue to record and share our observations with whomever we can, and readers can answer for themselves, are these creatures worthy of respect?

- Jeff Smith, Co-founder, Treasurer, ASP

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.

Make your check payable to:
Advocates for Snake Preservation

and send to: PO Box 2752, Silver City, NM 88062

Or donate online at: www.snakes.ngo/donate

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

In a **BIG** win for snakes, after more than 60 years, the Whigham Rattlesnake Roundup held their first no-kill, educational festival and it was a roaring success! There are no longer any rattlesnake roundups in Georgia that slaughter snakes. Words cannot describe how happy I am that they stuck with the decision they made in 2021 and that the new festival was successful. This is the change we're fighting for because it shows that live snakes bring in just as many people (if not more) as dead ones – and that will encourage other roundups to change.

THANK YOU, for all you do for snakes, every day!

Melissa Amarello

Executive Director, ASP



Melissa admires a pink Coachwhip (*Coluber flagellum*).

Coexisting with Pitvipers

A symposium organized by ASP at Biology of Pitvipers 4

6:00 – 8:30 pm • Friday 15 July 2022 • Rodeo • New Mexico, USA

Education and outreach are essential components of any conservation program, especially for those working with maligned, misunderstood animals that pose a potential threat to the public. So this summer we're organizing the first symposium on coexisting with snakes!

The **Coexisting with Pitvipers Symposium** will include:

- A brainstorming session where participants contribute to a list of effective outreach practices;
- A panel discussion with people who have extensive experience with various forms of outreach about pitvipers; and
- A presentation on a recent study testing the efficacy of different types of educational messaging.

We will also form a working group of participants interested in contributing to a guide on best practices for pitviper education and outreach to be published in an academic journal.

Updates will be posted on the symposium website: www.snakes.ngo/cps.

There is no additional charge to attend this symposium, but registration is required for Biology of Pitvipers 4. Find out more about the conference and register at: www.biologyofthepitvipers.com.



Porter, female Western Black-tailed Rattlesnake, hunts against a rock alongside a human walking path.

How Do You Read The Buzz? We'd appreciate a minute or two of your time to respond to our survey.

www.snakes.ngo/survey

The Buzz

Advocates *for* Snake Preservation

NonProfit Org
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit 541
85713

PO Box 2752 • Silver City, New Mexico 88062

Spring 2022 • #09



A Western Patch-nosed Snake (*Salvadora hexalepis*) foraging for dinner.

Advocates *for* Snake Preservation

uses science, education, and advocacy to promote compassionate conservation of 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

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

Read more snake stories on our website:

www.snakes.ngo/stories

Please Share!

When you're done reading The Buzz, please leave it where someone else can read it and learn to love snakes too.

Coffee shops • Libraries • Cafes • Bookshops



A baby Arizona Black Rattlesnake (*Crotalus cerberus*) hunting against a log, trying for his first meal.