Seasonal Patterns in Rattlesnake Behavior in the Southwest

Two male Western Diamond-backed Rattlesnakes engage in ritualized combat over an unseen female.

Monsoon: Courtship, Combat, Mating

In the arid southwest US, nearly all our rain falls in the summer, also called the monsoon, and winter. The monsoon's warm, humid conditions and increased productivity make it prime rattlesnake time, when most of their feeding and reproductive activity occurs.

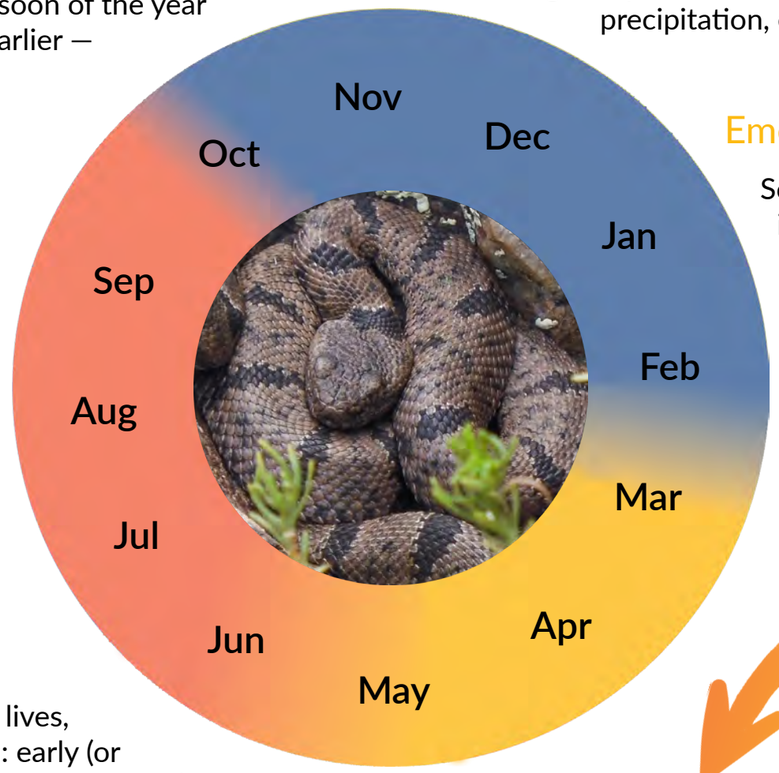
Courtship and mating occur during the monsoon of the year *before* a female rattlesnake gives birth,* or earlier — rattlesnakes can store sperm for years!

A male Western Diamond-backed Rattlesnake courts a female.

Denning

Most southwestern rattlesnakes are in or near their winter dens from October through March and even into May. They may emerge from their dens to get a quick drink from winter precipitation, even snow!

Two Rock Rattlesnakes in their den.



Emergence

Some rattlesnakes emerge from their dens and immediately head to hunting or nesting areas. But at some communal dens, they may stick around for weeks, several to dozens basking together. Pregnant females are usually the last to leave, when they're ready to move to their nesting area and start gestating.

Four Black-tailed Rattlesnakes lounging under a rock near their den.

Monsoon: Nesting

The Nesting season is the first couple weeks of newborn rattlesnakes' lives, when they stay close to mama. This also happens during the monsoon: early (or even a bit before the rain comes) for some species (e.g., Tiger and Rock Rattlesnakes) and late for others (e.g., Black-tailed and Western Diamond-backed Rattlesnakes).

New Black-tailed Rattlesnake family.

Pregnant Arizona Black Rattlesnakes.

Gestation

In the late spring and dry summer, moms-to-be are focused on thermoregulation to promote the health of their developing embryos. Most do not eat during this period because nesting areas are not often near hunting areas.*

www.snakes.ngo/moms

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