

Honduran Milk Snake

Lampropeltis triangulum hondurensis

Class: Reptilia **Order:** Squamata **Suborder:** Serpentes **Family:** Colubridae

Other names: none

Other subspecies: There are 24 subspecies of milk snakes, including Eastern Milksnake, *L. t. Triangulum*, found in Delaware and the Mid-atlantic

Other Relatives: Kingsnakes and milk snakes are closely related (same genus).



Zoo Milk Snakes 1.0

'Enrique' 1.0 – male

DOH: 1999-2000 Aq: 11/28/2005

About Enrique

Enrique was a relinquished pet and came with Tangerine. Enrique weighs 1 lb. 3 oz.

Status Not listed; not evaluated

Geographic Region

Nicaragua, Northeastern Costa Rica, Caribbean slope of Honduras [1]

Habitat

This milk snake species is found in low to mid-elevation rainforest leaf litter in Honduras, Nicaragua, and portions of northeast Costa Rica [2]



Characteristics

Size: 4 -6 feet in length, average weight is about 2.8 pounds.

Longevity: **Wild** 15 years; **Captivity** 20+ years

Physical Description

- Honduran milk snakes are a very colorful snake. They are tri-colored with bold rings of white/yellow, black, and red/orange that may or may not extend onto the belly and completely encircle the snake. [2].
- Protects itself from predators with its bright, venomous-looking coloration.
- While both milk snakes and coral snakes possess transverse bands of red, black and yellow, a common mnemonic can be used to properly distinguish between the deadly coral snake and the harmless milk snake: "Red on yellow will kill a fellow, but red on black is a friend of Jack."
- Tangerine, the Zoo's female Honduran, is named so because of her 'tangerine' color phase. She features wide black and red-orange rings on red, rather than the typical white/yellow/red/black coloring. Hobby breeders have cultivated a variety of color phases of this and many other species of commonly kept snakes.

Dimorphism

There are no reported color differences between males and females. There is no obvious secondary sexual characteristic that allow for instant determination of sex, however:

Males:

Females: generally larger than males

Diet: Carnivore

Nonvenomous constrictor

Diet in the Wild: Small mammals such as voles, mice, and rats, birds, eggs, and other reptiles (**ophiophagy**) including snakes (even venomous ones) and lizards [1] [2]

Diet in the Zoo: 2-3 mice, every other week

Behavior

- *Nocturnal*, night active [3]
- This species is harmless and non-venomous. It leads a solitary life, and is rarely seen in the open during the day.
- Milk snakes do not **bask** openly and are frequently discovered under an object that is in direct sunlight, absorbing heat from the object's underside. [2]

Feeding Behavior

- Its favorite hunting ground is around barns and other human locales. They burrow through loose leaf litter hunting for prey [2].
- It kills by constricting (squeezing) its prey. [2]

Defense Mechanisms

- When threatened, they will flee; but if cornered, they will hold their ground and raise the head to strike. [2]
- The thin tail sounds like a rattlesnake when they shake their tail quickly in leaf litter [2].

Reproduction

- **Oviparous**, egg-laying
- As with most snakes, sexual maturity is reached generally by size, rather than by age. However, Hondurans are typically mature by the age of 18 months. Most mating occurs in May. Females seem to gather at communal egg-laying sites in early June. It is not known why they do this. It is suspected that it may be due to a lack of suitable nesting sites, rather than for social reasons [2].
- The female lays 3-18 leathery-shelled eggs beneath rocks, in decaying plants or rotting logs, compost and manure piles, under boards, and in loose soil. The incubation period is 10 weeks. Hatchlings are large and robust and should start eating after their first shed, which occurs anywhere from 5-10 days from leaving the egg [2].
- Like many reptiles, the incubation temperature of their eggs determines the sex of the young (warmer =males; cooler = females) [2].

Conservation

- **Use & Trade:** suffers from collection for pet trade
- **Threats:** Two greatest causes for decline in their population are likely road mortality and deliberate killing by humans who believe they are dangerous. Habitat loss will eventually affect their numbers also [2].
- **Predators:** birds of prey, wild felids, humans (imitates the brightly colored banding of local venomous coral snakes and therefore gain protection from predators) [2]
- Many other important predators like birds-of-prey feed on young snakes. This means that snakes fulfill roles as both predators and prey in regional food chains. Milksnakes are also valuable in their role of curbing rodent populations, especially those near human settlement [1].

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- The milk snake's name originates from the incorrect belief that they drank milk from the udders of cows because they were often seen in barns and stables. In reality, they were hunting rodents, commonly found in those structures.
- These snakes are known for their imitation of the markings and behavior of the venomous coral snake. By such mimicry, they lead potential predators to believe they are dealing with a dangerous animals, and are thus left alone [1].
- Milk snakes use quick, jerky movements so that their bands flash, startling predators. Their bright colors signal danger and often confuse predators, making these snakes hard to follow [1].

Glossary: List of definitions of the most important recurrent technical terms used in the text.

Bask - lie exposed to warmth and light, typically from the sun

Brumation- a period of dormancy and low metabolic activity in reptiles that is similar to hibernation. During this time, metabolic and digestive systems slow or completely stop.

Oviparous- refers to animals that lay eggs, with little or no other embryonic development within the mother.

Ophiophagy - is a specialized form of feeding or alimentary behavior of animals which hunt and eat snakes.

Reference

[1] Sea World, "Honduran Milksnake," Sea World, 2014. [Online]. Available: <http://seaworld.org/animal-info/animal-bytes/reptiles/honduran-milksnake/>. [Accessed October 2014].

[2] Rosamond Gifford Zoo, "Honduran Milk Snake," Rosamond Gifford Zoo, 2014. [Online]. Available: <http://www.rosamondgiffordzoo.org/assets/uploads/animals/pdf/HonduranMilkSnake.pdf>. [Accessed October 2014].

[3] Henry Villas Zoo, "Animals : Reptiles," Henry Villas Zoo, 2014. [Online]. Available: https://www.vilas zoo.org/animals/index.php?category_id=4397&printable=1. [Accessed October 2014].