
TALES FROM THE TREE

The Quarterly Newsletter of Ziggy's Tree Wildlife Rehabilitation Center



Website: www.ziggystree.org

E-mail: ziggystreewildlife@gmail.com

The Gray Ratsnake (*Pantherophis spiloides*)

By Lisa Powers

Often considered a foe by many people, snakes should be considered our friends and allies!

One of the more commonly encountered and often misunderstood is the gray ratsnake (*Pantherophis spiloides*). These harmless and very beneficial snakes are sometimes known locally as chicken snakes, black snakes or pilot snakes. This species is found across the mid-South and all of the state of Tennessee.



Gray ratsnake assuming a defensive position in response to the photographers. It quickly calmed down once it realized we meant it no harm.

These non-venomous snakes eat a wide variety of prey. Its diet is made up primarily of mice and other rodents, eggs and young birds. It may often be found around farms where they may raid the chicken coop for eggs which is why they are often called chicken snakes.

They are a habitat generalist and can be encountered wherever prey is abundant. They are excellent at rodent control and often welcomed by farmers in their barns, storage buildings and silos.

They reach lengths on average of 4 to 6 feet although they rarely have been found at record lengths of over 7 feet. Average lifespan is 15-20 years.

These snakes are excellent climbers. In fact, if you see a snake up high in a tree or building and wonder how it got there, it is almost always a gray rat snake.



Ratsnakes are masters at climbing and may often be found up high in precarious places!

All of Tennessee's venomous snakes give birth to live babies. A few of our non-venomous species do as well, but most of our snakes lay eggs. So you can be certain if you find eggs they are from a non-venomous species like the gray ratsnake.

Ratsnakes have evolved some special tactics for dealing with predators. If they are out in the open and exposed, they may form a kinked pattern while stretched out. This is thought to break up the snakes outline so as to help obscure it from hawks and owls.

If you have ever come across a gray rat snake, you might have been quite startled by the vibration of the tail. Many snakes do this to alert you of their presence. The North American rattlesnakes just took it one step further by developing a rattle.

A WORD ABOUT SNAKES

Rat snakes may also defecate on you leaving a musky foul odor. This is meant to deter predators from trying to eat them. It certainly works for me!

When confronted they may coil and strike repeatedly but will usually quickly retreat if given the opportunity. A bite from one of these snakes is considered medically insignificant and is often more traumatic to the snake than the human. If you jerk away, it can rip out the snake's small teeth. These non-venomous snakes do not have fangs.



The gray ratsnake is one of our largest species commonly reaching average lengths of 4 to 5 feet. Larger individuals occur but are becoming increasingly rare. These common residents are found statewide.

So why should you leave gray rat snakes alone and not try to harm them? They are a more effective predator of rodents than any trap, poison, or other means humans have developed for rodent control. They help protect crops against food spoilage from rodent droppings. They eat rodents that consume crops; they consume fleas and ticks when they consume their prey. They also protect against home fires. Fires, you ask? Yes! The number one cause of undetermined house fires is from rodents chewing on wires and causing electrical shorts.

Consider yourself lucky the next time you come across these amazing creatures. Observe closely and you may see some interesting behavior from these fascinating snakes!

Lisa received her B.S. degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Science from Tennessee Tech in 1991 and continued her studies at Austin Peay State University where she studied Biology with an emphasis in Herpetology (the study of amphibians and reptiles). She is the Founding President of the Tennessee Herpetological Society and a current member. She is also a writer and accomplished photographer and while her main focus is on amphibians and reptiles, any living creature is fair game for her camera!

Photo credit for all snake pictures: Lisa Powers

Our reptile specialist has only taken in a few snakes over the years – we suspect because people are afraid of them. We hope that this informative article has at least helped you understand and respect the role that snakes play in our environment.



Hatchling ratsnake taking his first drink of water

The snakes we have taken in have been the result of two main causes – landscape netting and glue traps.

Glue traps are indiscriminate in their capture of wildlife – we've also taken in birds and small mammals that have fallen prey to these sticky nightmares, and many do not survive the encounter. Rather than use something that will harm wildlife, you can use more humane methods. For example, you can make your yard less attractive for snakes by keeping brush piles or rock piles or other hiding places away from your house. And avoid leaving pet food out, which attracts small rodents which in turn attracts their predators.

If you use landscape netting, be sure to check it frequently for wildlife that may become entangled. Should you find a snake that is trapped in the netting, you can cut around the snake (if you don't want to get close) and then contact our reptile specialist Rachel at 615-587-2977.

THE BIG PAYBACK 2021

Thanks to all of our supporters who donated during The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee's "The Big Payback", a one day on-line giving event supporting hundreds of non-profits in middle Tennessee. We raised a total of \$3,165 towards caging projects to expand our capacity and add to the species of animals we can accept.

Our donors

Gracie Vandiver
Cynthia Hart
Rebecca Burcham
Pippa Holloway
Devon Blackburn (in memory of Mary Ann Partington)
LouAnn Partington (in memory of Mary Ann Partington)
Kimberly Dutzek
Juniper Russo
Emily Haynes
Michael Stoecker
Linda Huggard
Tristen Russo
Bruce Hafford
Donna Jennings
Randi Maples
Mrs. A. Hensley
Bettina Bowers
Amanda Miranda
Patricia Rachkiss
Deborah Trimble
John Ham
Melissa Claborn
Jeanne Shaw
Kim Hannah
Susan Markel
Debbie Sykes
Vivian Russo
Sarah Fuqua
Michelle Boyer-Pennington
Hazel Fannin
Leith Tigges
Richard Eskind and Family Foundation
Joy Clay Chrisman
Meryl Stark
April Barrows
Anne Ray
John & Abby Ussery
Marcia Medford
Katherine Dolan (in memory of Mary Ann Partington)
Tahira Mohyuddin
5 Anonymous Donors

HERE'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

We've had a busy start to the year – but we're getting used to that! Our mammal facility quickly filled up with orphaned squirrels this spring, but we've also made room for some litters of opossums, injured chipmunks and orphaned groundhogs as well. We've just passed 100 intakes for our mammal team. Our permitting agency, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, has asked us to expand our mammal facility to include skunks and fawns. We've been raising money specifically for that purpose, but are in desperate need of some folks with construction skills who can help us build the specialized caging we need for these species.

April brought us into the thick of baby bird season. We're preparing to release the first youngsters we admitted, but are averaging 8 to 10 intakes daily. We've got hatchlings (the naked or downy babies) that we're feeding every half hour, but have also graduated some of the first intakes to our pre-release caging so that they can build up their flight muscles and their foraging skills. The leading cause of intakes for our songbirds continues to be free-roaming cats. We continue our efforts to educate people on alternatives, like catios, that provide a safe outdoor space for kitty and at the same time, keep the local wildlife safe from the cat.



Pileated Woodpecker nestling

Our turtle team is thankful for the warmer weather. They over-wintered a record 16 turtles. Since turtles brumate (their version of hibernation) during the colder winter months, we can't release any that are still recovering from their injuries – they need to stay awake to heal. With the milder and warmer temperatures, we'll soon be bidding a fond farewell to our shelled friends as we return them to their home territories.

SUPPORT ZIGGY'S TREE

- Become a member – just complete the application on the back of this newsletter, or visit our website to download and print an application.
- Give a gift membership to a friend!
- Purchase items from our wish list.
- Donate newspapers (we use those to line cages and cover the tables under the cages)
- Contact us about volunteer opportunities, such as transport, animal releases, administrative/office work, fundraising, board membership or contributing to our newsletter
- Like us on Facebook and Instagram and stay updated on releases, admissions and other news.
- Invite us to speak to your church or civic group – we love to tell people about the work we do!

Check our website at www.ziggystree.org for other ways you can support us!

WISH LIST

- Gift cards (grocery store, Lowe's, Home Depot, Tractor Supply)
- Dried Bloodworms
- High quality dry cat food
- Baby Food (fruit – apples, bananas, blueberries)
- Canned or frozen mixed vegetables
- LCD Projector
- Heating Pads (without automatic shut-off)
- Nuts (pecans, walnuts, acorns)
- Fresh Vegetables (broccoli, carrots, kale, sweet potatoes, zucchini, apples)
- Paper Towels
- Facial Tissues
- Toilet Paper
- Unscented laundry detergent
- 24, 36 or 48 inch Bungee cords

Contact us at 615-631-2205 or 931-393-4835 to arrange to drop off any of the above items.

For assistance with orphaned or injured mammals or general questions about mammals, text Angela at 615-631-2205.

For assistance with orphaned or injured birds or general questions about birds, call or text LouAnn at text 931-841-9781.

For assistance with injured turtles or snakes, text Rachel at 615-587-2977.

Looking for a project for your scout troop, church, school or civic group? We'd love to have more squirrel nest boxes, and could also use small bluebird or woodpecker boxes to use with our young cavity nesting birds. Contact us for more information.

KROGER COMMUNITY REWARDS

Thanks to our 69 participating families in the Kroger Community Rewards program, we've received our first quarter check for \$359.66. The funds we receive annually through this program are now covering approximately 6 weeks of our operating costs.

If you shop at Kroger and would like to support us through this program, just go on-line to www.kroger.com/community_rewards, and enroll your rewards card, selecting Ziggy's Tree as your charity. You still get gas points and discounts – and Kroger donates money to us!

Don't have an e-mail address or computer access? You can still sign up. Just call 1(800) KROGERS, OPTION 3 or 1(800)576-4377, OPTION 3.

For privacy reasons, Kroger does not provide names of those who have signed up to support us. So even though we can't thank you personally, please know that we are extremely grateful for your support.

And please ask your friends and family to enroll and support us!



THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS SUPPORTERS!

SUSTAINING

Sharon Butcher
Banjo Baby Squirrel Fund
Karen Dean
Deborah Trimble
Derrick Lewis

SUPPORTING

Amy York * Debbie Bomar * Susan Gruber
Lynn Smith * Brady Palmer * Sarah Wellman
Leigh Kelly * Critter Gitter * Kimberly Saxon
James Richards * Wilton Belk * Robin Mitchell
Emily Thomas * Kishore Shah * Emily Keller
Michelle Hale Barker * Jack Triplett

FAMILY

Larry & Mary Ann Partington * Dennis Wood
Laura & Travis McCall * Donna Jennings
Michelle Boyer-Pennington * Phyllis Moore
Kim Emani * Marilyn Heindrichs * Daimon Duggar
Kimberly Otts * Skye Ball

INDIVIDUAL

Kala Davis * Emily Marshall * Pippa Holloway
Tennessee Bird Brigade * John McGugan * April Wright
Deborah Bohlen * Amanda Doliana * Kelly Minor
Chelsea Phelps * Debbie Mauney * Donna White Dropkin
Samuel Womer

VETERINARIANS

Pet Medical Center
Airport Animal Clinic
Creekwood Veterinary Hospital

IN-KIND & CASH DONATIONS

Linda Foster * Laurel Rowland * Anonymous
Emilij Thomas * Rachel Booher * Ingrid Graudins
Tracy Jones * Gina Cleek * Julie Wotruba
Andrew Hammitt * Sandy Smith

IN MEMORY OF MARY ANN PARTINGTON

Michael & Martha Bradley
Karl & Dottie Smith
Tracy Dimon

2021 RELEASES

JANUARY

1 Eastern Bluebird
1 American Robin

FEBRUARY

1 American Goldfinch
1 Purple Finch

MARCH

1 Eastern Screech Owl
1 Eastern Bluebird

APRIL

2 Purple Finches
1 American Robin
14 Eastern Gray Squirrels
3 Fox Squirrels



*Brown Thrasher – our first baby bird of the year
And also his Superhero name*

Ziggy's Tree Wildlife Rehabilitation Center
92 Maple Ave.
Tullahoma, TN 37388



NOTICE: YOUR MAILING LABEL CONTAINS YOUR MEMBERSHIP EXPIRATION DATE.

To avoid any interruption with delivering your newsletter, we ask that you renew at least one month before the date shown. Use the Membership Form provided below.

PLEASE RENEW, STAY INFORMED, WE NEED YOU!!!

YES, I WANT TO SUPPORT ZIGGY'S TREE, I AM ...

- A NEW MEMBER**
 RENEWING MY MEMBERSHIP

Memberships are for one year
Gift Memberships are also available.

Please Mail This Form To:

**Ziggy's Tree WRC
92 Maple Ave.
Tullahoma, TN 37388**

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY.

___ Individual	\$25.00
___ Family	\$40.00
___ Supporting	\$100.00
___ Sustaining	\$250.00
___ Advocate	\$500.00
___ Wildlife Champion	\$1000.00

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____
Home Phone (____) _____ Zip _____ -- _____
Work Phone (____) _____
e-mail _____

I would like to receive my newsletter by email.

I am interested in volunteering in the following areas:

- ___ Environmental Education
___ Wildlife Rehabilitation
___ Fundraising/Administration

Checks should be made payable to Ziggy's Tree WRC. You can also renew/donate by credit card at [Paypal.me/ziggystree](https://www.paypal.com/merchot/cgi-bin/?cmd=_expresscheckout&source=merch).

Not sure what to get that special someone for birthdays, anniversaries or just because? Consider giving them a one year membership to Ziggy's Tree!

Members receive our newsletter and our gratitude.

Ziggy's Tree strives to be environmentally conscious. If you would prefer to receive an electronic copy of our newsletter, please check the box above or e-mail ziggystreewildlife@gmail.com to be placed on our mailing list.