

Giant Garter Snake (*Thamnophis gigas*)

Status - Federal: Threatened; California: Threatened

The giant garter snake is considered the largest of the garter snakes, with some adults reaching a length of more than 5 feet. Since most individuals are smaller, size may not be the best means of identification.

The snake is usually dark brown to olive or tan; northern snakes are often darker-colored and have bolder stripes than San Joaquin Valley snakes. The snake has



Photo: John Brode, CDFG



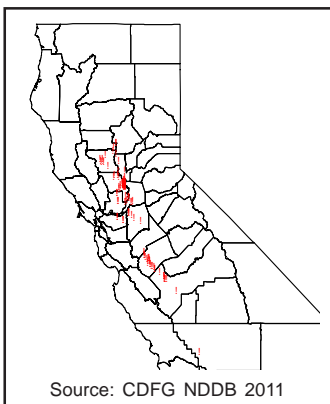
Photo: George E. Hansen. Life On the Edge

three stripes that can be pale, yellow or even orange. Along its side it has rows of black dots that may appear as a checkered or blotched pattern. Snakes emerging from dormancy are often muddy and may appear to be a solid, dark color.

Habitat

The giant garter snake requires habitat that offers permanent or summer water with vegetative cover, dense populations of food organisms, and higher elevation uplands not subject to flooding. (*over*)

Giant Garter Snake



Source: CDFG NDDB 2011

During its active period (*March 1 through October 31*), the giant garter snake emerges in March or April and mates. It remains close to its denning habitat until May or June, then moves throughout the available aquatic habitat. It inhabits natural and artificial wetlands. It lives in rice fields, irrigation supply and drainage canals, freshwater marshes, sloughs, ponds, and other aquatic habitats.

The snake uses grasses, weeds, cattails, tules, and other vegetation for basking, foraging and cover. It might also be

seen on roads or in drains, check dams, culverts, rocks, fallen logs, debris piles, and other structures.

Food

The snake feeds on tadpoles, frogs, small fish, and other small vertebrates, and may be drawn to receding wet areas where prey is concentrated.

Denning

During its dormant period (October 31 through March 1), it requires denning areas that remain above floodwaters. Snakes spend most of their dormant period in small mammal burrows located on elevated roads or in fields, railroad trestles, and ripped ditch banks.

Range

Giant garter snakes can occur in suitable habitat, as described, throughout the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys, including the following counties: Butte, Colusa, Contra Costa, Fresno, Glenn, Madera, Merced, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano, Sutter and Yolo.

For more information contact:

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