Giant Garter Snake (*Thamnophis gigas*)
Habitat and Behavior

Photo: Glen Wyle, USGS Biological Resources Division

At one time, the giant garter snake inhabited Central Valley wetlands from Chico (Butte County), south to Buena Vista Lake (Kern County). Today, the giant garter snake can be found in the following:
- Rice production zones of Sacramento, Sutter, Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Fresno, and Merced counties.
- Along the western border of the Yolo Bypass in Yolo County, and west of the Yolo Bypass in Solano County.
- Along the eastern fringes of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, from Elk Grove to Stockton, and
- In the San Joaquin Valley, in Fresno and Merced counties.

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Giant Garter Snake

Behavior during Active and Dormant Periods

Active (March 1 to October 31)
Snakes normally emerge from denning burrows in March, as the temperature warms. At first, the snake basks in the sun near the burrow, often returning to it at night. Breeding occurs from march to June; young are born from July to September.

The giant garter snake usually moves to aquatic habitat by May. Wary and shy, it will dart away or dive for cover at the least alarm, often before you are aware of its presence. The snake hunts during the day, but can be active at night during warm weather (>90º F.).

During September, snakes begin moving back to denning areas. As water soources dry up, their prey concentrates in small pools and the snakes may be found nearby in riprap, debris, drains, or other structures.

During their active period, watch out for snakes--especially while driving on levee roads.

Dormant (October 31 to March 1)
Giant garter snakes are dormant during the winter months and spend most of their time in burrows, some may emerge on sunny days to bask.

Remember, when snakes are in or near burrows they can be harmed by cultivation, construction, or ditch maintenance activities

For more information contact:
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