

San Francisco Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis tetrataenia*)

Status -- Federal: Endangered; California: Endangered



Photo: John Brode, CDFG



Photo: Kennan Ward

The San Francisco garter snake lives secretively in wetlands or grasslands near ponds, marshes, and sloughs, where it is likely to retreat into water when disturbed. This snake has a broad, greenish yellow stripe that runs the length of its back, bordered in black and flanked on either side by red and black stripes. The top of its head is red and its belly is blue green.

An adult SF garter snake can grow to 51 inches (130 cm) in length. Most often they are found around ponds and marshes that support large frog populations.

San Francisco garter snakes may also spend time in upland areas, especially during autumn and winter, and may overwinter there.



Photo: Frank S. Balthis

San Francisco Garter Snake



Source: Life on the Edge, 10 Speed Press, 1994

Distribution

The SFGS historical range lay entirely within San Mateo county. It extended from the San Francisco county line south along eastern and western foothills of the Santa Cruz mountains to Point Año Nuevo. They are currently limited to small areas within this historical range. In 1990 however, a single snake was captured at Rancho del Oso, near Davenport in Santa Cruz county.

San Francisco Garter snakes have been sighted in four managed areas, all within San Mateo county: Pescadero Marsh Natural Preserve, Año Nuevo State Reserve, Laguna Salada, and the San Francisco State Fish and Game Refuge.

Behavior SFGS is an active diurnal snake. During the warm days of summer most activity occurs during the morning and afternoon.

During cooler weather of spring and fall, and at higher elevations, snakes restrict their activity to the warm afternoons. On warm days of winter they can be observed basking in the sun at the entrance of their hibernating burrow. Preferred nocturnal retreats are thought to be holes, especially mammal burrows, crevices, and surface objects.

Food Although San Francisco garter snakes prefer frogs, they also prey upon other amphibians and small fish. Prey includes California Red-legged frogs (*Rana aurora draytonii*), Pacific tree frogs (*Hyla regilla*), California newts (*Taricha torosa*), Western toads (*Bufo boreas*), and Mosquitofish (*Gambusia affinis*).

Reproduction San Francisco garter snakes mate in autumn or spring. Female SFGS can store sperm through the winter and bear an average of 12-24 young in July or August.

California Department of Pesticide Regulation
Endangered Species Program
<https://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs>

