

Along The Trail

by
ken legg

I do not expect to change many opinions about snakes. To the average person, it seems, a snake is the worst thing in the entire world, even ranking above poison oak as an object of hatred.

Poisonous reptiles, of course, are to be respected; we should not attempt to make friends with them unless we are experts at handling snakes. The non-poisonous snakes such as the four common Santa Cruz species, the garter, gopher, ring-necked, and racer, are very beneficial and are harmless to man.

One of our most common reptiles is the garter snake, a species found throughout the United States. Garter snakes, or striped snakes, as they are often called, are characterized by three yellowish stripes extending lengthwise on the body. It is our only snake having longitudinal stripes. The background color varies between dark brown, black or green.

Garter snakes are closely related to water snakes; in fact, the garter is a water snake. In some sections it departs from its aquatic surroundings and becomes terrestrial.

I came across an item which says garter snakes eat only cold blooded prey such as frogs, toads, tadpoles, fish and earthworms. The author erred though, for I once saw a garter snake eating a small meadow mouse. Apparently the snake had nailed the mouse by the posterior for as I came upon the scene the little mouse was squeaking pitifully and attempting to bite his captor. The posterior two-thirds of his body was in the snake's mouth but the snake seemed to be experiencing difficulty in getting over the front shoulders.

I never interfere in Nature's battles but in my attempt to get a closer look I scared the snake and it released the mouse. The mouse was still alive and tried to run. However, the entire hind quarters were useless and the mouse could only drag his back legs. The pressure of the snake's jaws was so great that he had crushed the portion of the prey that was in his mouth.

Whether it was the same snake or not is difficult to say, but sometime later near the scene of the mouse-snake incident, the tables were turned and the garter snake fought in vain for his life. The garter had a hold on a bunch of dead grass; he had thrown an ever tightening loop about the grass and was putting up quite a struggle. Resistance was useless, however, for a fourth of his body, including his head, was inside a yellow-bellied racer.

The racer, also needing an anchorage, had thrown a kink like a sharp U in his body and dropped the kink into a hole. With his peg in the hole giving him holding power he was breaking the loop on the grass and gradually sucking in the garter snake.

Some snakes, of course, kill their prey before eating. The poisonous ones kill with venom while others, such as the king snake, make their kills by constriction. In this method, ever-tightening loops of the snake's body gradually squeeze the prey to death. The garter snakes use

neither method but rely on speed in striking out and in getting a firm grip on their victims. They swallow their prey alive.

Most of our garter snakes around Santa Cruz are quite small, few over 18 inches long being seen. Some, in other parts of the United States, get to be up to a yard in length.

Some snakes lay eggs; others bear living young. Those bearing young are known as viviparous snakes. The garter is one of these; it often bears as many as 30 young in a litter.

Many tall tales are rife about creatures of the wild. Perhaps none has caused so much controversy as the tale about parent snakes swallowing their young to give them protection. This story is not only untrue, but because of certain functions of the body, impossible. Men who lay claim to validity of the story know nothing of the anatomy or physiology of the snakes.

Such arguments as: "But we cut it open and saw the young snakes inside," are foolish. Anyone who opens up a female snake about to bear young will find snakes inside of her body. The only way anything can pass down a snake's throat is to pass into the digestive system and this means death.

In 30 years' of active field observation and study the great authority on reptiles, Raymond Ditmars, says he has never seen anything which even suggests an attempt by a parent snake to protect its young.

Naturalists who like to pick up the harmless snakes for study, observation and company, do not care for the garter snake because of a disagreeable odor which is produced by glands at the base of the tail. These odors may play some part in the breeding processes.

Anytime we take a picture of a dead snake, it looks like nothing except a "dead snake." Snakes are cold blooded animals, that is, their body temperature is the same as that of the surrounding air. In order to slow down snakes and make them more adaptable to portraiture naturalists put them in the refrigerator. When sufficiently de-activated the reptile is released to assume a natural and live-looking pose. The snake in our illustration was given the ice box treatment by Ranger Ed Earle at Big Basin.

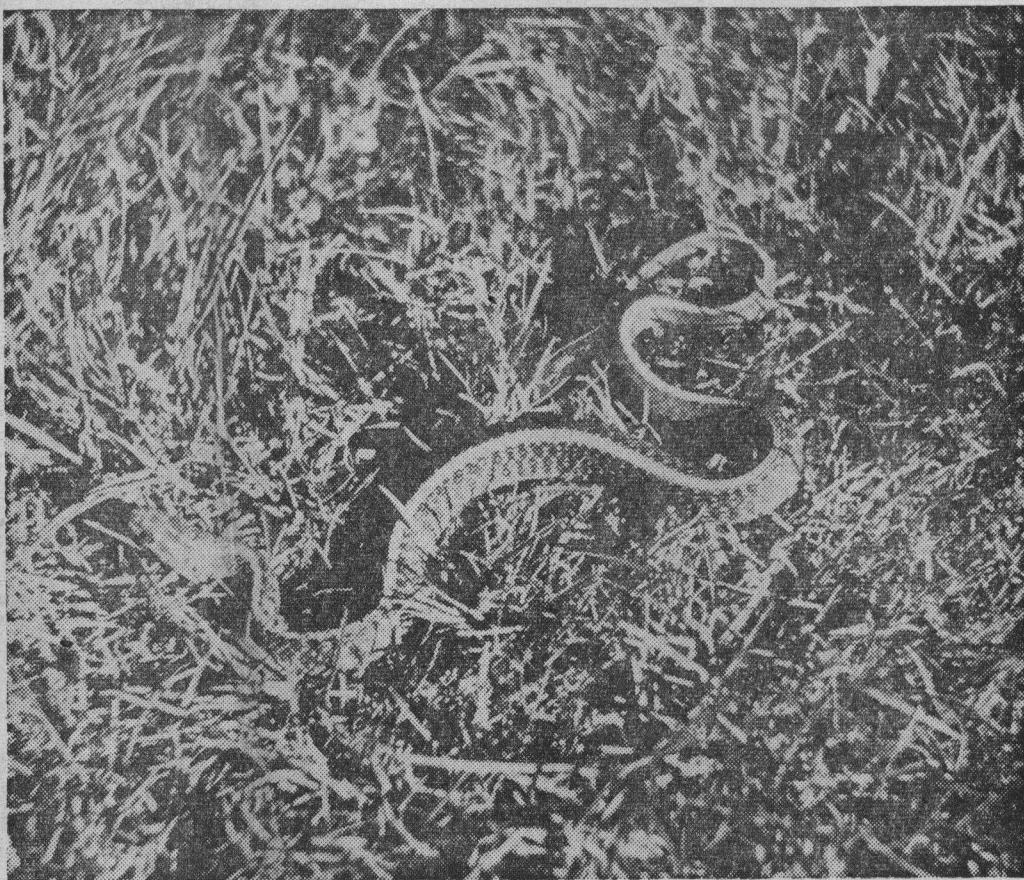
Two Policemen, Youth Are Hurt As Cars Crash

Two police sergeants and a 15-year-old boy suffered minor injuries Friday in a two-car collision at the intersection of Chestnut and Locust streets.

The crash took place when a car driven by a 19-year-old San Rafael youth—traveling at least 40 miles per hour—smashed into the left front side of the patrol car as it pulled out into Chestnut from Locust. Those hurt and their injuries were:

Traffic Sgt. Tony Valine, driver of the police vehicle, bruises and possible rib injuries. Detective Sgt. Ernest Marengi, Valine's passenger, bruises and a

It's Just A Little Ole Garter Snake



This little reptile, which underwent the "icebox" treatment before being photographed, belongs to a species

which may be found almost anywhere in the United States—the garter snake. It is one

of the four species common to Santa Cruz and is regarded as beneficial and is harmless to man.

Pagni Family's Army Is Rugged Guard For Club

Cool Weather Spreads Across Suffering East

By The A

The coolest son spread s the nation y pected to re by tonight.

Temperatu fall to the 4 east by tonight midwest were 40s last night.

Cold Canada southeastward central portio reaching as f and Missouri Panhandle. So and thunderst along the edge.

Tempera reached the 90s Friday f 40s and 50s plains and up ley yesterday. had 57 early y compared with time Friday.

In the-Los A ing sea breezes the longest and in the city's b straight days of 100 or more.

In addition t the edge of the showers and th were reported in tic states. Some amounts in six included: Enid, inch; Oklahoma nute, Kan., .62; Savannah, Ga., .5 1.34, and Miami,

Olive May Box Dies At 80

Olive May Box, 80, a resident of Santa Cruz for the last 30 years, died last night.

Reno (R).—The next burglar with designs on the Club Jubilee south of Reno had better think twice before he goes to work.

He's s with