

NORTHERN RUBBER BOA

CHARINA BOTTAE (BLAINVILLE, 1835)

NATURAL HISTORY SUMMARY BY JASON PARILLO

Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Reptalia

Order: Squamata

Family: Boidae

Genus: *Charina*

Species: *C. bottae*

Description

The Northern Rubber Boa, *Charina bottae*, is a thick bodied snake that looks and feels like rubber with a short, blunt tail. The average adult length ranges from 356 mm - 797 mm with the tail comprising about 13% of the total length. Adult females are longer and weigh more than their male counterparts. Newborn and juvenile boas display a pink to light tan dorsum and a light cream or yellow venter. The adults vary in color from a light to chocolate brown on the dorsal surface and tan or yellow on the ventral surface. Brown, black, or specks of orange mottling are characteristic of the adult snakes. The adults display a sharp demarcation between ventral and dorsal color that is often blended in juveniles. Young boa eye color is medium to dark grey, while the eyes of the adults are grayish green, gold, or brown. Both juvenile and adult rubber boas have a vertically oval pupil. Adult males possess well developed anal spurs that are mostly uniform in size and shape. Female spurs are hidden or absent, but if present are much smaller than the male spurs. The male spurs are projected downward and hook shaped. Female spurs are conical in shape, project to the rear, and are of different sizes within a single individual. The dorsal scales are small and the top of the head is covered with large, symmetrical plates. A diverse assemblage of head scale configurations has been documented. No two individual head scale configurations are alike. They often vary greatly in size, shape, number, and position (Hoyer 2017).

Distribution

The Northern Rubber Boa has a wide distribution across British Columbia, Canada. In the United States, its distribution is limited to Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, California, and Utah (NatureServe 2017). *Charina bottae*'s range map is available at Hammerson 2007.

Diet

Northern Rubber Boas are carnivores that prefer nestling rodents and insectivores. They have been known to eat lizards (Lacertilia) and their eggs, bats (Chiroptera), baby rabbits (Leporidae), and small birds (Aves) (Hoyer and Stewart 2000).

Habitat and Ecology

Charina bottae can be found in the riparian areas of palustrine wetlands. Their terrestrial habitat includes conifer forests, hardwood forests, mixed forests, grasslands, and shrublands. They have a need for soil or fallen logs to burrow and are usually not far from water. They can be found under rocks, in crevices, in stumps, or under rotting logs (NatureServe 2017). Due to a lack of defenses other than secretion, they often fall prey to other snakes, birds of prey, and a variety of predatory mammals. The Northern Rubber Boa is crepuscular, diurnal, hibernates/aestivates, and is nocturnal (NatureServe 2017).

Reproduction and life cycle

Northern Rubber Boas are ovoviparous. The females bear one to nine live young between August and November (California Herps n.d.). The young leave the nest in the spring and reach maturity in two to three years. Rubber boas can live 40-50 years in the wild (California Herps n.d.).

Conservation Status

The Northern Rubber Boa is relatively secure throughout its range with the exception of Nevada and Wyoming, where it is vulnerable and imperiled respectively (NatureServe 2017). In addition to habitat loss, the main threat to the species is its collection as pets.

Cultural Significance

As a hope for protection from grizzly bears, Rubber Boa tails were worn as charms by hunters in certain Native American tribes (Rockney and Wu 2016).

Specimen Specific Detail

The *C. bottae* specimen from the Burton Ostenson Museum of Natural History collection at Pacific Lutheran University was collected on January 14, 1969, the same day an accidental explosion destroyed the USS *Enterprise* in Pearl Harbor. The specimen was collected by Sandra Morgan and was taken from Purdy, Washington. Despite the preservation-related discoloration, the specimen displays the characteristically lighter ventral surface.

Literature Cited

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