

THE GLOSSY SNAKE (*ARIZONA ELEGANS*)

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INTRODUCTION

The genus *Arizona* is a monotypic genus with its species being *Arizona elegans*. This species was first described by Kennicott in 1859. The type is actually two specimens (cotypes) collected at the lower 'Rio Grande,' Texas, and 'between Arkansas and Cimarron' River, Oklahoma. Later in 1950, Smith & Taylor restricted this rather broad locality to Eagle Pass, Maverick County, Texas.

DESCRIPTION

Glossy snakes are moderately sized, averaging 60-100 cm in total length. The maximum length attained by this species is 142 cm.

Snakes of the genus *Arizona* have a dorsal pattern comprised of 39-83 blotches that can be tan, brown, or grayish in color. These blotches are wider than they are long, and are edged in black. The ground color is more variable and can be straw, cream, light brown, yellowish-gray, pinkish, or gray. The ventrum coloration is white, buff, or yellowish, and is unmarked (except in the California glossy snake). On each side of the head there is a dark postocular stripe that passes from the eye to the angle of the jaw. Frequently there is a lighter band crossing the head between the eyes.

Depending on the subspecies, the scale rows at mid-body range between 25-35. The dorsal scales in this species are smooth. Two of the more noticeable characteristics of this species are the pointed snout and the countersunk lower jaw. Another, less obvious characteristic is the obscurely elliptical pupil.

RANGE

Glossy snakes are found in the southwestern United States, northern Mexico, and northern Baja, California. In the United States, their range includes southern and southwestern California, southern Nevada, southern, western, and northeastern Arizona, New Mexico (except the west-central and north-central portions), extreme eastern Colorado, extreme southwest Nebraska, western and south-central Kansas, western Oklahoma, and northwest, western, and southern Texas.

In Mexico, there are records from the following states; Aguascalientes, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Durango, Jalisco, Nuevo Leon, San Luis Potosi, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tamaulipas, and Zacatecas.

HABITAT

Glossy snakes are burrowing snakes, preferring dry, open, sandy or loose soiled areas. They can be found in barren deserts, bushy (mesquite and creosote) deserts, sagebrush flats, grasslands and occasionally woodlands. They are generally found at elevations below 1500 m.

SUBSPECIES IN THE UNITED STATES

	scale rows (midbody)	number of dorsal blotches
<i>Arizona elegans</i> (Kansas glossy snake)	29-31	39-69
<i>Arizona elegans arenicola</i> (Texas glossy snake)	29-35	41-58
<i>Arizona elegans candida</i> (Mojave glossy snake)	27 or fewer	53-73
<i>Arizona elegans eburnata</i> (Desert glossy snake)	27	53-83
<i>Arizona elegans noctivaga</i> (Arizona glossy snake)	25-29	50-75
<i>Arizona elegans occidentalis</i> (California glossy snake)	27	51-75
<i>Arizona elegans philipi</i> (Painted Desert glossy snake)	27	53-80

FOOD

The various subspecies of *Arizona elegans* feed upon lizards, snakes and small mammals. These snakes kill their prey by constriction.

REPRODUCTION

Breeding generally occurs from April through June, with eggs being laid in June or July. Females can lay between 3-23 eggs, the eggs being approximately in length. The eggs usually hatch in August or September and the hatchlings are 20-28 cm in total length.

HABITS

Glossy snakes are primarily crepuscular or nocturnal throughout much of their range. In the eastern part of their range they are reported diurnal as well, especially during the cooler months. These snakes seem to be more tolerant of cooler temperatures than are many of the other desert

species found within their range. They can also endure rather hot temperatures as well, as one study indicated that they could withstand temperatures of up to 42°C.

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