

# CROTALUS SCUTULATUS

(Kennicott),  
*The Mojave Rattlesnake*



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## ■ HISTORICAL

The Mojave Rattlesnake of the southwestern United States and central Mexico was first described by Robert Kennicott in 1861 as *Caudisona scutulata*. In this description, Kennicott did not designate either a type specimen or a type locality. In 1950, Smith and Taylor subsequently restricted the type locality to Wickenburg, Maricopa County, Arizona.

*Crotalus scutulatus*

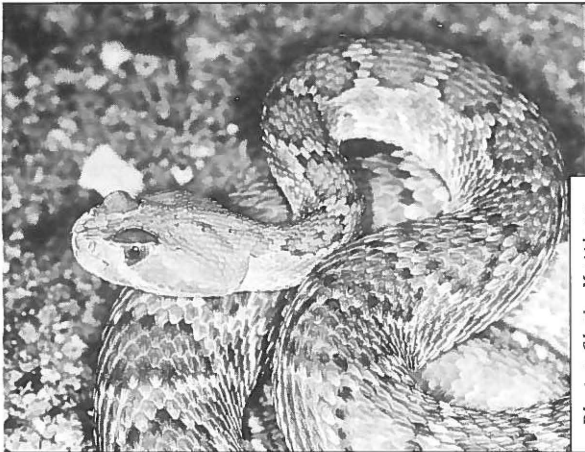


Photo: Chris Mattison

Since the genus *Crotalus* was described in 1758 it predated the genus *Caudisona* (described in 1768) and so in 1895, Cope placed *scutulata* in the genus *Crotalus*. Later in 1895, Gunther described *Crotalus salvini* from Tlaxcala, Mexico. In 1940, Gloyd placed *salvini* as a subspecies of *Crotalus scutulatus*, and the two forms stood as the Mojave rattlesnake, *C. scutulatus scutulatus*, and the Huamantlan rattlesnake, *C. scutulatus salvini*.

## ■ HABITAT

*C. scutulatus* from the United States are typically lowland rattlesnakes being found in bushy plains and deserts, borders of washes, flat grasslands, creosote and mesquite covered flatlands, grassy plains and prairie valleys.

Elevation records for this species have reached 8,300 ft. (2500 m.), but these higher elevations are mostly obtained by *C. s. salvini* and some southern populations of *C. s. scutulatus*. The majority of specimen of *C. s. scutulatus* are found from sea level to about 6,000 ft.

## ■ FOOD

Mojave rattlesnakes feed primarily on rodents and small mammals such as kangaroo rats, pocket mice and ground squirrels. They do, however, occasionally eat lizards (*Cnemidophorus*) and even other snakes.

## ■ HABITS

During most of the year, *C. s. scutulatus* from the United States and northern Mexico are nocturnal especially during the summer months. The more southern populations of *C. s. scutulatus*, and most *C. s. salvini* tend to be more crepuscular and even somewhat diurnal due to the lower daytime temperature found at these higher elevations.

Mojave rattlesnakes are quite common in some areas and can be found frequently crossing roads at night.

## ■ BREEDING

*C. scutulatus* usually breed in April or May with the young being born in July or August, and occasionally September. Females give birth to between 2-11 young that measure 9-11 inches in total length.

## ■ The subspecies *Crotalus scutulatus scutulatus* (Kennicott), THE MOJAVE RATTLESNAKE

### Description

The ground color of this subspecies can be greenish gray, olive green, greenish-brown, brownish-yellow, or sometimes even yellowish. The dorsal pattern is made up of between 27-44 (mean 36.6) diamond-shaped blotches which are generally brown in color. These blotches are edged with a single row of light unicolor scales, giving these snakes a well defined pattern. The head is marked on each side with a dark postocular stripe extending to the corner of the mouth. This stripe is bordered by two light stripes, one of which originates at the supraocular scales and extends to the upper labial scales, the other starts behind the eye and

continues posteriorly above the angle of the mouth. The tail is strikingly marked with a series of black rings which are narrower than the white interspaces. These rings number 3-8 (mean 5) in males, and 2-6 (mean 3.7) in females. The color of the anterior lobe of the rattle is black above and light below. This character is only applicable to adult snakes as it takes a couple of years before a juveniles light colored lobe will change. Mojave rattlesnakes are moderate in size with a maximum length of 51 in. (129.5 cm.), but most adults, however, average between 2.5-3 ft.

### Scalation

*C. s. scutulatus* typically have 25 scale rows at mid-body, the range being between 21-29. Subcaudal scale counts range from 21-29 (mean 24.8) for males, and from 15-23 (mean 19.4) for females. Ventral scale counts range between 155-187 (mean 178.2) for males, and between 170-192 (mean 181.2) for females. There is also a greater subdivision of the head scales in this subspecies as compared to *C. s. salvini*.

### Range

*C. s. scutulatus* is found from the Mojave Desert in California, southeast through southern Nevada, extreme southwest Utah, Arizona (western, central and southern), extreme Southwest New Mexico and the Trans Pecos region of Texas.

Its range continues into Mexico and includes northern Sonora, Chihuahua Durango, western and southern Coahuila, Zacatecas, southern Nuevo Leon, southwest Tamaulipas, San Luis Potosai, Aguascalientes, eastern Jalisco, northern Guanajuato, and northwestern Queretaro.

■ **The subspecies *Crotalus scutulatus salvini* (Gunther),  
THE HUAMANTLAN  
RATTLESNAKE**

First described by Gunther in 1895 from a specimen collected in Huamantla (Tlaxcala), Mexico, at an elevation of 8,000 ft. (2462 m.)

**Description**

This subspecies is not as colorful as the nominate form, usually having an olive-gray ground color with between 30-35 (mean 32) brownish-olive blotches. These blotches are rarely bordered by the row of light colored scales so typical in *C. s. scutulatus*.

The dark postocular stripe is present but does not extend more than halfway to the angle of the mouth, and is often only two or three scales in length.

The tail has rings encircling it, but the narrow dark rings are the same color as the dorsal blotches, not black as in *C. s. scutulatus*. The average number of tail rings is 4 for males, and 3 for females. The anterior lobe of the rattle is usually entirely light colored.

The Huamantlan Rattlesnake is a smaller form of *scutulatus*, having a maximum length of 3 ft., with most adults averaging about 2 ft. in total length.

**Scalation**

This subspecies typically has 25 scale rows at mid-body, the range being 24-29. Subcaudal scale counts range between 23-26 (mean 24.5) for males, and from 18-20 (mean 18.8) for females. Ventral scale counts range from 165-172 (mean 168.0) for males, and from 165-175 (mean 172.0) for females.

**Range**

*C. s. salvini* occupies a small range in Mexico that includes southeast Queritaro, southern Hidalgo, northeast Mexico, Tlaxcala, central Puebla and extreme west-central Veracruz.

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