

Snakes on Wet Ground...



A Texas Coral Snake, *Micrurus tener*, foraging among the pine needles.

Has anyone else noticed the apparent increase in the number of snakes around this year? I've had days when I've seen as many as six different snakes here at the Biology Station and recently had a day when I encountered four different species within a single hour.

The species that seem to be most common here include the ubiquitous Texas Rat Snake, *Elaphe obsoleta lindheimeri*, in its all black form, Eastern Yellow-Bellied Racer, *Coluber constrictor flaviventris*, Texas Coral Snake, *Micrurus tener*, and Broad-Banded Water Snake, *Nerodia fasciata confluens*. These are the four that I recently saw in a single hour but I've also seen a number of Western Ribbon Snakes, *Thamnophis proximus proximus*, and a few of the tiny Texas Brown Snakes, *Storeria dekayi texana*, this spring.

The most commonly encountered snakes here this year have not, surprisingly, been Rat Snakes but about equal numbers of Coral Snakes and Yellow-Bellied Racers. The former is not too surprising since I generally see a few Coral Snakes during a typical year (though, considering we're only half-way through the year, the numbers seem elevated) but the latter are quite surprising. I hadn't seen a single Racer in almost nine years and didn't see my first one until mid-summer of last year and now I seem to see one every week or so.

My second Broad-Banded Water Snake encounter of the year also seemed unusual since I again saw it sunning itself on the edge of the

north meadow, well outside the tree line and apparently a long way from water. This time I made the foray into the trees to see that, in fact, it was closer to water than I had thought because the pond is flooded well up the inlet stream to very near the northeast corner of the meadow.

I had occasion to take a survey trip recently with local herpetofaunal guru, Bill Montgomery of Elgin, and queried him about the number of snakes, with a question about what effect the saturated ground is having on snakes and reptiles. He suggested that, along with the rain, the cooler than usual temperatures were allowing snakes to be a bit more active. So this may mean that the "increased" numbers could simply be an artifact of them spending more time foraging and being more active or spending more time "sunning" in the cooler temperatures.

The one missing element that I have yet to see this year at all—unusual since there are usually one or two right here in the garden at the residence house—are Broad-Banded Copperheads, *Agkistrodon contortrix laticinctus*.

Come to think of it, maybe this is a good thing! Still, they're conspicuous by their absence.