**Texas Ratsnake, or Black Ratsnake**

***Elaphe obsoleta***

Photo by Adam Dawson (juvenile Texas Ratsnake) Photo by Steve Schwartzman

 <http://www.austinreptileservice.net/solid.html> <http://www.austinreptileservice.net/solid.html>

DESCRIPTION

* Adult has dark gray to black blotches on a red, orange, yellow, or even white background. Juveniles have brown blotches on a gray background
* Slender but sturdy bodies, square heads, flat bellies
* Adults range from 4 to 6 feet long
* Non-venomous

LIFE CYCLE

Lifespan of 15 years

Mating occurs after emerging from hibernation in spring

Gestation is about 1.5 months

Females can lay up to 30 eggs

BEHAVIOR

* Mostly diurnal
* Very aggressive when cornered or captured, either coiling and rattling their tails in imitation of a rattler, or emitting a foul-smelling odor on their preators
* Constrictors
* Hibernate in cold months, usually with other snakes of the same or different species
* Non-venomous
* Excellent climbers, and will go into attics, barns, and under homes in search of prey

HABITAT

* rivers and streams
* heavily wooded areas

FOOD

* Any kind of rodent, especially mice and chipmonks
* Young birds and bird eggs.
* Fond of hen’s eggs, and for this reason is often incorrectly called a “chicken snake.”

SOURCES

* <http://www.austinherpsociety.org/newsite/index.html>
* Chris Harper PowerPoint presentation to ECRC
* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elaphe#Life\_Cycle\_and\_Behaviors
* http://www.austinreptileservice.net/solid.html