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The Alameda whipsnake is a **threatened species**. Threatened species are plants and animals whose population numbers are so low that they may become endangered in the future.

Endangered species are plants and animals that are in immediate danger of becoming extinct.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Endangered Species Protection Program (ESPP) will help ensure that pesticide use does not jeopardize the survival of listed species.

Masticophis lateralis euryxanthus

Alameda Whipsnake *Masticophis lateralis euryxanthus*

Description and Ecology

Status Threatened, listed December 5, 1997.

Critical Habitat Designated October 2, 2006.

Appearance There are two subspecies of *Masticophis lateralis*. The more common chaparral whipsnake, *Masticophis lateralis lateralis* (which has a more extensive distribution in California and Baja California) is similar to the Alameda whipsnake, *Masticophis lateralis euryxanthus*, but the latter has some distinguishing characteristics. Both are slender, have slender necks, and large heads and eyes. However, the color along the back of the Alameda whipsnake is sooty black, while the chaparral whipsnake is more olive-brown-black. The Alameda whipsnake has a wider and more-orange, yellow lateral stripe. The undersides of both are similar—orange-rufous colored toward the head, cream at the midsection, and pinkish at the rear and tail - but the Alameda whipsnake lacks distinct spotting on the underside of the head and neck and lacks a dark line across the scale near the tip of the nose. The light stripe that runs from the tip of its nose to its eye is uninterrupted.

The Alameda whipsnake is diurnal. It moves swiftly with its head held high above the ground, occasionally moving it from side to side perhaps to assist its depth perception.

Range It is likely that the range of the Alameda whipsnake has always been very restricted, limited to the coastal scrub and oak woodland communities of the East Bay in Contra Costa, Alameda, and parts of San Joaquin and Santa Clara Counties, CA. Its range remains relatively similar, but is now smaller and highly fragmented due to habitat loss and alteration. The current distribution has been fragmented into five populations; the Tilden-Briones, Oakland-Las Trampas, and Mount Diablo-Black Hills populations in Contra Costa County, the Hayward-Pleasanton Ridge population in Alameda County, and the Sunol-Cedar Mountain population largely in Alameda County with extensions into San Joaquin and Santa Clara Counties. There is believed to be little or no interchange between these populations. Critical habitat was designated

for the Alameda whipsnake in 2006, and the units generally correspond to these known populations.

Habitat Alameda whipsnakes inhabit local variations of chaparral—coastal sage scrub and northern coastal scrub. Although their home range centers on shrub communities, they venture as much as 500 feet into adjacent grasslands, oak savanna and oak-bay, open woodlands. As woodland canopies close and stands of vegetation grow tall and dense, a cool environment evolves that the Alameda whipsnake will then avoid. Rock outcrops and talus are characteristic of whipsnake habitat. They offer cover for whipsnakes and promote populations of their primary prey—lizards. Alameda whipsnakes also use small rodent burrows, rock and soil crevices, and brush and debris piles for retreat. They tend to be found on southwest, south, and southeast oriented slopes.

Biology and Behavior The Alameda whipsnake is an ectotherm. It might first emerge by sliding its head out of its burrow into the sun. Then it will bask its whole body until its temperature is 91.4-93.4°F. It has two annual peaks in activity. The first extends from March, when it leaves its hibernaculum, until mid-June, following courtship and mating. Eggs are laid in clutches of 6-11, and will require three months incubation. Hatchlings have been located during the second smaller peak in activity, from August through November. Afterwards, like mature snakes, they will seek out a hibernaculum for winter hibernation.

This sleek swift snake captures equally swift prey such as the western fence lizard and western skink. It takes its prey quickly, holds it tight under the loops of its body and swallows it without constriction. The Alameda whipsnake's home range may have one or more core areas and specific retreats. Alameda whipsnakes require 2-3 years to reach maturity, may live for eight years and can reach a length of five feet. They are good climbers, and are able to escape into scrub or trees. Their predators are California king snakes, raccoons, striped skunks, opossums, coyotes, gray foxes, red foxes, hawks, feral pigs, dogs, cats, and cars.

Alameda Whipsnake

Alameda Whipsnake Information Sources

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Alameda whipsnake habitat in Contra Costa County, CA
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Adult Alameda whipsnake, Contra Costa, County
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