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Nels H. Troelstrup Jr.

South Dakota State University, nels.troelstrup@sdstate.edu

Regina D. Cahoe

South Dakota State University

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DESCRIPTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A RED-BELLIED SNAKE POPULATION AT OAK LAKE FIELD STATION

Regina D. Cahoe and Nels H. Troelstrup, Jr.
Biology and Microbiology
South Dakota State University
Brookings, SD 57007

ABSTRACT

Habitat use and population biology of the northern red-bellied snake (*Storeia occipitomaculata occipitomaculata*) were studied at Oak Lake Field Station (2003-2004) to enhance existing knowledge and future management efforts in eastern South Dakota. The red-bellied snake is listed as a monitored species in South Dakota, species of special concern in Nebraska and protected in Iowa. Forty-three snakes were caught by hand and from drift fences from May-August 2003. Thirty-two additional snakes were caught by hand or were birthed from May-September 2004. Nearly twice as many females (69%) as males (31%) were collected. Snout-vent length ranged from 27 to 245 mm (mean=157 mm) and body mass from 0.3 -11g (mean =3.9 g). Snake body temperatures ranged from 21.2°C -29.2°C (mean=25.4°C). Forty-three percent of captured snakes were found on northerly aspects. Over half (53%) were captured on unpaved roads consisting of 90% or greater sand and gravel. Capture sites within vegetation were dominated by grasses and forbs. Six snakes were collected in haystacks, one within a thatch ant mound and one in ash immediately following a prescribed burn. No snakes were found between 1200 hrs-1600 hrs throughout both summers and most (86.6%) were collected late in the growing season. Two gravid females gave birth in captivity within three to five days of capture. Young body mass ranged from 0.29g-0.32g (mean=0.30 g). Four of the fifteen young were born dead. All live young were fully developed and were active within minutes of birth.