



Effie Yeaw Nature Center

Reptile & Amphibian Residents of the Nature Center

Gopher Snakes Dragonette, Fred and Jasper

Personal History:

Dragonette and Fred are the offspring of former EYNC resident snakes. They hatched in July of 1996. Originally named Dragon, Dragonette surprised her caregivers by laying eggs in the summer of 2001, prompting her name change. She was named for her tendency to stay inside the artificial cave in her enclosure and hiss or strike at caretakers. Once outside her enclosure, she usually settles down. Her brother, Fred, is easy going but likes to hide in pockets or get tangled in belt loops if not handled carefully. Jasper hatched from one of Dragonette's eggs mentioned above.



Natural History: Gopher Snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus*)

Description: Gopher snakes grow to a length of 48 - 100". They are large, powerfully built snakes, with a small head and a pointed tail. Their coloring is yellow or buff with black, brown or reddish-brown blotches on their backs and sides. Gopher snakes are generally diurnal, but may be active at night in hot weather.

Habitat: They can be found in dry, sandy, pine-oak woodlands, grasslands, cultivated fields, prairies, open brush, rocky desert, and chaparral. In this area they are found primarily in the Sierra Nevada foothills, but they can live at any elevation from sea level to 9,000 feet.

Food: Mice, rats, ground squirrels, pocket gophers, rabbits, eggs, birds up to the size of quail, and occasional lizards are all part of the gopher snake's diet. They kill their prey by constriction.

Communication: Gopher snakes are usually solitary, and will often remain motionless when approached, but can move quickly if aroused. When cornered it will coil its body, draw back, spread its head, (somewhat like that of a rattlesnake), fill its lungs, then lunge and hiss at the intruder. In dry leaves the tail may vibrate, imitating faintly the rattler's warning.

Reproduction: Mating occurs in spring or early summer. The average clutch is 6-7 eggs, but may be anywhere from 3-12. Depending on temperature, the eggs take approximately 70 days to hatch. Emerging young are usually 8-12" long.

Care of Young: The female lays her eggs in a warm spot, perhaps in decaying vegetation, and then leaves them. There is no record of maternal care.

Nesting & Den Behavior: Gopher snakes are also called Bull Snakes. Sometimes they are mistaken for rattlesnakes. The gopher snake is different from a rattlesnake because it is not venomous, has no rattles, no heat sensitive facial pits, and its neck is not noticeably smaller than its head.