

ROUGH EARTH SNAKE

Haldea striatula



WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE?

This is a very small, plain grayish-brown snake. Some might be a very warm, almost reddish-brown while others are very nearly gray, but none of them has any pattern of spots or stripes. The belly can be pearly-white or somewhat cream-colored, again with no pattern. The scales along the upper back have a small raised ridge or keel running front-to-back (thus the snake is called a “rough” earth snake, though the little snake does not feel particularly rough). Perhaps its most distinguishing feature is the pointed head that is only barely wider than the neck, so that the head may look a bit too small for its body.

Adult rough earth snakes grow to about 7 to 10 inches in length, occasionally a bit longer. They are among Texas’ smallest snakes.

HOW DO THEY DEFEND THEMSELVES? CAN THEY HURT YOU?

This snake has no venom and it is hard to imagine this snake biting a human with its narrow head and small mouth. It is unlikely that its tiny teeth could break the skin. When captured, it may twist about and expel musk

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and feces, which could make it less appealing to a predator. There is one report, described in the Werler & Dixon book, of a rough earth snake death-feigning (twisting and contorting, then becoming still, as if dead). After being left alone for a short time, the snake resumed normal behavior and crawled away.

WHERE ARE THEY FOUND?

They range from Virginia southward and back along the Gulf states to Texas and north to Kansas. They are found in roughly the eastern half of Texas.



Photo: Meghan Cassidy

Close-up of a rough earth snake's head

Rough earth snakes are most often found under leaf litter, stones or boards (where more than one is sometimes seen at the same spot). Several kinds of habitat – woods, fields, edges of wetlands, or urban/suburban gardens – can support this species as long as the soil is somewhat damp and there are logs, leaf litter, stones or discarded material for them to live under.

WHAT DO THEY EAT?

These little snakes eat earthworms and sometimes other small soft-bodied invertebrates. There are reports of them eating very small frogs or lizards.

HOW DO THEY REPRODUCE?

Rough earth snakes give birth to babies (they do not lay eggs) generally from mid- to late-summer. Each newborn is between 3 and 4.75 inches. They are born with a pale collar or band across the back of the head, which fades as the snake grows.

WHAT CONSERVATION PROBLEMS DO THEY FACE?

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List shows this snake under the category of “least concern.” In other words, the available information says that overall, its populations are stable.

Sources of information:

IUCN Red List. <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/64002/90070320>

Werler, J.E., & J.R. Dixon. 2000. Texas Snakes: Identification, Distribution, and Natural History. Austin: University of Texas Press.



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