

Upland Snake Species Profile:

North American Coral Snake *Micrurus fulvius*

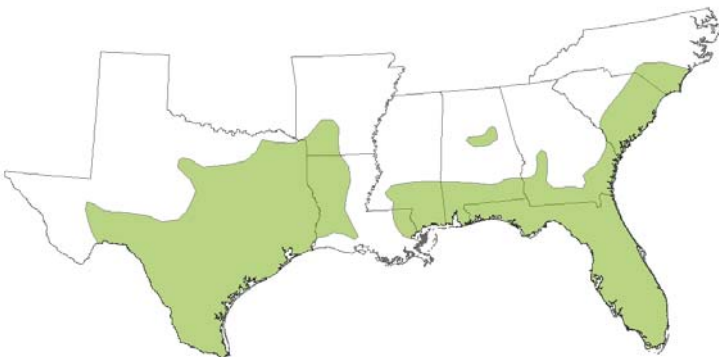


Photo: D. Stevenson

Range: Coral snakes can be found from southern North Carolina south through Florida and west through southern Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas.

Identification: Coral snakes can be identified by the red, yellow and black bands that cover its entire body. The body scales on this snake are smooth and in 15 rows. The venomous coral snake can be distinguished from scarlet and milk snakes by the patterning of their bands; the yellow and red stripes of the coral snake are adjacent to each other, leading to oft quoted rhyme, "Red on black, friend of Jack. Red on yellow, kill a fellow."

Natural History: This species prefers dry habitats such as oak hardwood hammocks and seasonally flooded pine flatwoods and spends a significant portion of time underground, buried in sandy soils or under wood debris. Coral snakes may also co-inhabit burrows with gopher tortoises.

Active primarily during the day, coral snakes can be observed foraging for other reptiles, which are their main prey item, by searching under leaf litter and ground cover.

Coral snakes are highly venomous, and their bite is potentially fatal. The venom attacks the nervous system, causing muscle failure and difficulty in breathing. When treated with antivenin, there is a good chance that bite victims will survive. Due to its short fangs, the coral snake is not much of a danger unless handled.

Despite their venom, coral snakes are preyed on by birds of prey, bullfrogs and other snakes.

Conservation: As with most other reptiles, the primary threat to the continued persistence of coral snakes is habitat degradation. However, this species is likely more common than it appears due to their secretive nature and populations may be stable throughout much of their range. In Alabama though, coral snake populations have declined, corresponding with the introduction of the exotic invasive fire ant.

Useful References:

Conant, R. and J.T. Collins. 1998. A Field Guide to the Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America. Houghton Mifflin Company. New York.

Ernst, C.H. and E.M. Ernst. 2003. Snakes of the United States and Canada. Smithsonian Institution. Washington.

For more information, contact:



GOPHER TORTOISE COUNCIL

c/o Florida Museum of
Natural History

P. O. Box 117800

Gainesville, FL 32611-7800

www.gophertortoiseCouncil.org