

Catalogue of American Amphibians and Reptiles.

WILSON, LARRY DAVID. 1973. *Masticophis flagellum*,

Masticophis flagellum (Shaw)
Coachwhip snake

Coluber flagellum Shaw, 1802:475. Type locality, "Carolina and Virginia," restricted to Charleston, South Carolina (Schmidt, 1953). Holotype not designated.

Psammophis flagelliformis: Holbrook, 1842:11.

Masticophis flagelliformis: Baird and Girard, 1853:98.

Herpetodryas flagelliformis: Duméril, Bibron, and Duméril, 1854:210.

Bascanium flagelliforme: Cope, 1877:64.

Bascanion flagelliforme: Smith, 1882:636.

Zamenis flagelliformis: Boulenger, 1893:389.

Bascanion flagellum: Stejneger, 1893:596.

Zamenis flagelliforme: Ditmars, 1912:218.

Masticophis flagellum: Ortenburger, 1928:5.

• CONTENT. Seven subspecies are recognized: *cingulum*, *flagellum*, *fuliginosus*, *lineatulus*, *piceus*, *ruddocki*, and *testaceus*.

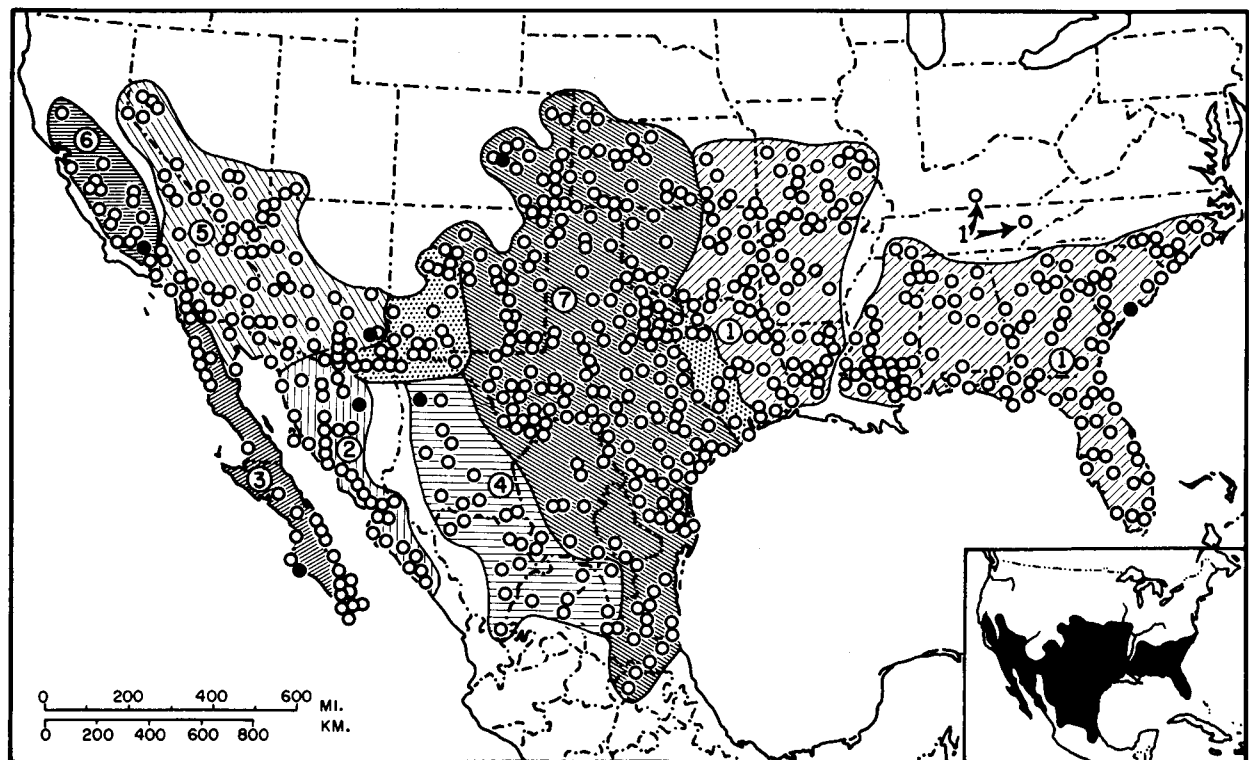
• DEFINITION. *Masticophis flagellum* is a whipsnake with 17 dorsal scale rows on the anterior portion of the body, 8 supralabials, a juvenile dorsal pattern consisting of narrow or wide crossbands on the neck, and a variable adult pattern that never consists of longitudinal pale stripes, irregularly scattered dark lines, or dark spots at the bases of the dorsal scales.

• DESCRIPTIONS. The species *M. flagellum* has been most recently reviewed by Wilson (1970), who described variation in external characters and presented descriptions of certain internal characters. Wilson's (1970) review updated that of Ortenburger (1928). Additional descriptions of the various races are as follows: *M. f. flagellum*—Carr and Goin (1959), Anderson (1965), Smith (1950), Smith (1961), Webb (1970); *M. f. testaceus*—Hudson (1942), Smith (1950), Maslin (1953),

Stebbins (1954, 1966), Axtell (1959), Minton (1959), Webb (1970); *M. f. lineatulus*—Smith (1941), Stebbins (1954, 1966), Conant (1965), Fowlie (1965); *M. f. piceus*—Klauber (1942), Stebbins (1954, 1966), Fowlie (1965); *M. f. ruddocki*—Brattstrom and Warren (1953); *M. f. cingulum*—Bogert and Oliver (1945), Lowe and Woodin (1954), Zweifel and Norris (1955), Fowlie (1965); *M. f. fuliginosus*—Schmidt (1922), Linsdale (1932), Cliff (1954), Etheridge (1961). Hemipenial morphology and dentition have been discussed by Ortenburger (1928) and Wilson (1970). Walls (1931) discussed eye structure.

• ILLUSTRATIONS. Photographs and/or drawings of all subspecies are provided by Wilson (1970), and Ortenburger (1928) presented photographs of *M. f. testaceus* and *M. f. piceus* (red and black phases). Conant (1958) depicted *M. f. flagellum* and *M. f. testaceus*. Anderson (1965) and Smith (1950) pictured *M. f. flagellum*. Van Denburgh (1922) illustrated the red and black phases of *M. f. piceus*. Fowlie (1965) presented photographs of *M. f. cingulum* and *M. f. piceus* as well as a *M. f. cingulum* or *M. f. cingulum* × *piceus* intergrade labelled *M. f. "lineatulus."* Stebbins (1966) included a painting of a specimen of *M. flagellum* from Santa Cruz Co., California, which closely resembles the pink phase of *M. f. testaceus*.

• DISTRIBUTION. *Masticophis flagellum* occurs in relatively dry, warm habitats across the southern half of the United States, coast to coast, from North Carolina westward through Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, Nebraska, and eastern Colorado, thence southwestward through central and southern New Mexico and southern Arizona. From there the range extends northward through southwestern Utah, south-central Nevada, and southern and central California. In México *M. flagellum* occupies the Mesa Central and both coastal lowlands as far south as northern Veracruz, Queretaro (Dixon, Ketchersid, and Lieb, 1972; Dixon, pers. comm.), southern Durango, and central Sinaloa, as well as the entire peninsula of Baja California. A wide variety of habitats are occupied, including pine and palmetto flatwoods, pine hills, open prairies, oak woodlands, desert scrub, thorn forest, and chaparral.



MAP. Solid symbols mark type-localities; hollow symbols mark other known localities. Major areas of intergradation are shown by stippling.

• **FOSSIL RECORD.** The known fossil history of *Masticophis flagellum* is limited to the Pleistocene and Recent epochs. The only locality from which the species has been reported as fossil where it is not known to occur presently is Smith Creek Cave, Baker, White Pine County, Nevada (Brattstrom, 1958). Other definite fossil records are as follows: Florida (Holman, 1959; Auffenberg, 1963); Arkansas (Dowling, 1958); Texas (Holman, 1962, 1969); California (Brattstrom, 1953); Nevada (Brattstrom, 1954, 1958); New Mexico (Brattstrom, 1964).

• **PERTINENT LITERATURE.** The most recent and comprehensive taxonomic work is that of Wilson (1970). Literature on other aspects of the biology of this snake is scattered. Reports on food and feeding habits are included in Van Denburgh (1922), Little and Keller (1937), Marr (1944), Cowles (1946), Curtis (1949), Clark (1949), Woodin (1953), Cliff (1954), Langebartel and Smith (1954), Fouquette and Lindsay (1955), Zweifel and Norris (1955), Gehlbach (1956), Hamilton and Pollack (1956), Gates (1957), Carpenter (1958), Cunningham (1959), Grant and Smith (1959), Blair (1960), Miller and Stebbins (1964), and Walker, Taylor, and Maslin (1966).

Data on reproduction are in Force (1930), Brennan (1934), Marr (1944), Clark (1949), Werler (1951), Perkins (1952), Guidry (1953), Carpenter (1958), Cunningham (1959), and Anderson (1965). Parasites and predators were noted by Ortenburger (1928), Harwood (1933), Loomis (1956), and Peterson (1963). Mosauer (1935) reported on locomotion, Fowlie (1965) on defense and escape, and Wilson (1968) on time of activity. Temperature relationships were studied by Cowles and Bogert (1944), Miller and Stebbins (1964), Brattstrom (1965) and Bogert and Cowles (1947). Other aspects of behavior were noted by Allen (1933), Fowlie (1965), Hallowell (1852), Klauber (1942), Linsdale (1940), Lowe (1964), Miller and Stebbins (1964), Ortenburger (1928), Stebbins (1954), Taylor (1936), Van Denburgh and Slevin (1913), Grinnell and Grinnell (1907), Minton (1959), Lee (1968), Loding (1922), Cowles (1941), Curtis (1949), Leviton and Banta (1964), and Kenney (1941). Information on distribution and habitat is summarized in Wilson (1970).

• **REMARKS.** Wilson (1970) recognized two groups within the species *M. flagellum*, the *testaceus* group and the *piceus* group.

• **ETYMOLOGY.** The name *flagellum* is a Latin word meaning "whip" in reference to the whiplike shape of the body and the braided appearance of the scales on the tail.

1. *Masticophis flagellum flagellum* (Shaw)

Coluber flagellum: Shaw, 1802:475. See species account.

Zamenis flagellum flagellum: Cope, 1900:789 (part).

Coluber flagellum flagellum: Stejneger and Barbour, 1917:79 (part).

Masticophis flagellum flagellum: Ortenburger, 1923:2.

• **DEFINITION.** A subspecies with a dark to very dark brown anterior dorsal coloration grading from tan to dark brown posteriorly, or if dorsum is pale tan (as in certain disjunct populations in Florida and Georgia) then narrow dark crossbands are present on the neck and juvenile markings characteristic of the *flagellum* group are present on the head.

• **REMARKS.** Wilson (1970) noted that the zone of intergradation between *M. f. flagellum* and *M. f. testaceus* in Oklahoma "is largely conjectural"; Webb (1970) has delineated it. Wilson (1970) pointed out that the range of intergradation is very narrow north of Dallas and Tarrant counties in northern Texas, and Webb (1970) reported that both subspecies have been recorded from several counties in central Oklahoma.

2. *Masticophis flagellum cingulum* Lowe and Woodin

Masticophis flagellum cingulum Lowe and Woodin, 1954:247.

Type locality, Moctezuma, Sonora, México, ca. 2000 ft. Holotype, University of Arizona 672, adult male, collected by A. W. Ruff, summer 1951 (examined by author).

• **DEFINITION.** A subspecies with a highly variable color pattern, the dorsal coloration ranging from a series of long reddish brown bands separated by shorter, paired light bands to uniformly reddish brown or black.

• **REMARKS.** For some time after the description of this subspecies, specimens from Sonora, México, not conforming to that description were assigned to *M. f. piceus* (Zweifel and Norris, 1955; Stebbins, 1966). Wilson (1970) demonstrated that the range of *M. f. cingulum* encompasses all of Sonora, México, except for the Gran Desierto, as well as south-central Arizona, and that the coloration ranges from a banded pattern to one that is uniformly black or red.

3. *Masticophis flagellum fuliginosus* (Cope)

Zamenis lateralis fuliginosus Cope, 1895:679. Type locality, Santa Margarita Island, Baja California del Sur, México. Syntypes, U. S. Natl. Mus. 15135-15136, adult male and female, respectively, collected by the crew of the U. S. Fish Commission vessel *Albatross*, 2 May 1888 (examined by author).

Bascanion laterale fuliginosum: Van Denburgh, 1905:26.

Masticophis flagellum fuliginosus: Wilson, 1970:63.

• **DEFINITION.** A subspecies with two color phases, one having a yellow or light gray dorsum with a zig-zag pattern of black bands along the body and wider dark bands on the neck, and the other having a dark grayish brown dorsum with a lineate pattern of varying length on the lateral portion of the dorsum, and a variable amount of cream coloration on the venter.

• **REMARKS.** This subspecies was resurrected by Wilson (1970) for specimens from the Peninsula of Baja California that had been previously assigned to *M. f. piceus*.

4. *Masticophis flagellum lineatulus* Smith

Masticophis flagellum lineatulus Smith, 1941:394. Type locality, 11 mi N San Buena Ventura, Chihuahua, México. Holotype, U. S. Natl. Mus. 105292, adult female, collected by H. M. Smith, 22 October 1938 (examined by author).

• **DEFINITION.** A subspecies with a tan or light gray dorsum, each dorsal scale on the anterior portion of the body having a central longitudinal dark streak. The posterior portion of the venter and underside of the tail are salmon pink, this color not fading in preservative.

5. *Masticophis flagellum piceus* (Cope)

Bascanion flagelliforme piceum Cope, 1875:40. Type locality, Camp Grant (= Fort Grant), Graham County, Arizona. Holotype, U. S. Natl. Mus. 7891, skin of adult female (?), collected by E. Palmer, no date (examined by author).

Bascanion flagellum frenatum Stejneger, 1893:208. Type locality, Mountain Spring, Colorado Desert, San Diego County, California. Holotype, U. S. Natl. Mus. 16340, adult female, collected by C. R. Orcutt, June 1890 (examined by author).

Zamenis flagellum piceus: Cope, 1900:804.

Zamenis flagelliformis frenatus: Ditmars, 1907:288.

Zamenis flagelliformis piceus: Ditmars, 1907:288.

Coluber flagellum frenatus: Grinnell and Camp, 1917:190.

Coluber flagellum piceus: Stejneger and Barbour, 1917:79.

Masticophis piceus: Ortenburger, 1923:2.

Masticophis flagellum frenatus: Ortenburger, 1923:2.

Masticophis flagellum frenatum: Klauber, 1926:144.

• **DEFINITION.** A subspecies with two color phases, one black and the other red. The former is completely black dorsally and salmon pink to red posteroventrally. The other phase is pink to red with crossbands on the neck that range in color from that of the general ground color (in which case the anterior and posterior edges are outlined with darker pigment) to black.

6. *Masticophis flagellum ruddocki* Brattstrom and Warren

Masticophis flagellum ruddocki Brattstrom and Warren, 1953:177. Type locality, ¼ mi S ridge at Wheeler Ridge and 1½ mi W U. S. Hwy. 99, Kern County, California. Holotype, University of California at Los Angeles 6108 (now in collection of Museum of Vertebrate Zoology), adult male, collected by J. W. Warren, 12 April 1953 (not examined by author).

• DEFINITION. A subspecies with a light yellow to olive yellow dorsum with neck bands obsolete or absent.

7. *Masticophis flagellum testaceus* (Say)

Coluber testaceus Say, 1823:48. Type locality, headwaters of Arkansas River near the Rocky Mountains = junction of Turkey Creek with the Arkansas River, 12 mi W Pueblo, Pueblo County, Colorado. Holotype lost.

Psammodon flavigularis Hallowell, 1852:178. Type locality, frontiers of Texas to Creek Territory = Cross Timbers, Oklahoma. Holotype, Acad. Nat. Sci. Philadelphia 5388, sex unknown, collected by S. W. Woodhouse, no date (not examined by author; according to Malnate, 1971, there are 2 syntypes, ANSP 5387-88).

Masticophis flagelliformis testaceus: Jan, 1863:65.

Masticophis flagelliformis testacea: Jan, 1867: livr. 20, pl. 6, fig. 2.

Bascanium flagelliforme testaceus: Yarrow, 1875:542 (part).

Bascanium flagelliforme bicinctum Yarrow, 1883:153. Type locality, Old Fort Cobb, Texas. Holotype, U. S. Natl. Mus. 11814 (not listed by Cochran, 1961).

Coluber flagelliformis testaceus: Garman, 1883:43 (part).

Masticophis flagellum flavigularis: Ortenburger, 1923:2.

• DEFINITION. A subspecies with a light tan or light brown to pinkish-red dorsum, with or without short darker crossbands on the neck or long crossbands on the anterior portion of the body, and a double row of dark spots on the otherwise cream belly.

COMMENT

The status of the populations of *Masticophis flagellum* in northern Sinaloa remains uncertain. Hardy and McDiarmid (1969) allocated them to *M. f. piceus*, although noting that they are not typical of *piceus* in coloration. Wilson (1970), on the other hand, assigned specimens of *M. flagellum* from Sonora, México (except the Gran Desierto and the mountainous eastern portion) to *M. f. cingulum* and left the populations in northern Sinaloa *incertae sedis*. This problem is in need of resolution.

The area of intergradation between *M. f. piceus* and *M. f. ruddocki* is in need of further study, as is that between *M. f. piceus* and *M. f. fuliginosus* in San Diego County, California.

The ecology of this species is poorly known. No work comparable to that of Fitch (1963) for *Coluber constrictor* is available for the coachwhip, even though it is relatively common in many parts of its range.

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