

FIRST RECORDS OF ALBINISM IN *NERODIA RHOMBIFER* (DIAMONDBACK WATER SNAKE)

RAY D. BURKETT AND JAMES A. HUGGINS

Department of Biology, Shelby State Community College, Memphis, TN 38174-0568

Baptist Memorial Hospital Campus, Union University, Memphis, TN 38104

ABSTRACT--Two albino diamondback water snakes, *Nerodia rhombifer*, were taken at Reelfoot Lake, Tennessee, in the summers of 1988 and 1989. These represent the only known albino specimens of this species. Five amelanistic specimens of this species were previously reported from Greene County, Arkansas, approximately 60 km southwest of Reelfoot Lake.

In the summers of 1988 and 1989, two albino *Nerodia rhombifer* (diamondback water snake) were captured at Reelfoot Lake in Tennessee. The specimen from 1988 was killed by a fisherman near Samburg, Obion County, Tennessee, and given to D. Haggard, naturalist at Reelfoot Lake State Park. This adult specimen, about 930 mm in length, was frozen and will be freeze-dried and put on permanent display at the Reelfoot Lake State Park Visitor Center. The specimen from 1989 (Fig. 1), a juvenile measuring about 350 mm in length, was captured in Lake County and was on display at the Reelfoot Lake State Park Visitor Center until its death.

Dyrkacz (1981) reviewed the literature on albinos of all species of amphibians and reptiles and listed the degrees of albinism found among amphibians and reptiles. According to his classification, the specimens from Reelfoot Lake would be classified as partial albinos with xanthophores, since they lack all integumentary pigment except yellow.

Both snakes have a light yellow ground color with a white pattern of chainlike markings and pink eyes. We previously reported five amelanistic (without melanin) juveniles born to one female of this species from the St. Francis River bottoms of Greene County, Arkansas, approximately 60 km southwest of Reelfoot Lake (Burkett and Huggins, 1985).

Dyrkacz (1981) reported instances of albinism in two closely related species, *Nerodia fasciata* and *Nerodia sipedon*, but the only known instances of albinism in *N. rhombifer* are from the two locations reported herein. The occurrence of aberrant colors in these two relatively close populations, raises the question of possible gene flow across the Mississippi River valley and the possibility of finding other abnormally colored specimens from this geographic area.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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LITERATURE CITED

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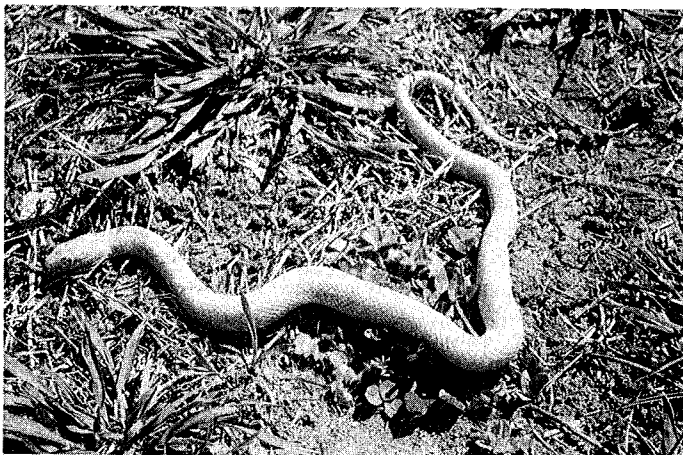


FIG. 1. Juvenile albino (with xanthophores) *Nerodia rhombifer* from Reelfoot Lake in Lake County, Tennessee. Photo by R. Burkett.