

## Banded Sand Snakes in Rocky Uplands

**Don E. Swann**  
Saguaro National Park

**Erin Zylstra**  
U.S. Geological Survey, Sonoran Desert Field Station

Banded sand snakes (*Chilomeniscus cinctus*) are primarily thought of as dwellers of low desert sandy soils, usually associated with creosote bush. However, the Peterson Field Guide to Western Reptiles and Amphibians (Stebbins 1985) also includes as habitat “sandy-gravelly washes and arroyos in rocky uplands (paloverde-saguaro association), and thornscrub habitats in Mexico.” Given elevation ranges are from sea level to 3000 feet (910 m). In this note we describe 2 banded sand snakes found in rocky foothills of the Rincon Mountains, Saguaro National Park, Pima County, Arizona at elevations of 3871 feet (1180 m) and 2880 feet (878 m).

The first record (1180 m) was from the south side of the Rincon Mountains on a hiking trail on 12 December 2000. The animal was active on the surface and a photograph was taken by EZ (Figure 1). The area was dominated by perennial shrubs including goldenweed (*Ericameria larissafolia*), catclaw acacia (*Acacia gregii*), and honey mesquite (*Prosopis velutina*) but was not associated with a wash or arroyo. Vegetation in this area of the Rincon Mountains includes some shrub species of the Mexican

thornscrub community (such as feathertree, *Lysiloma watsoni*) that exist here at the northern edge of their range (Turner et al. 2000).



**Fig. 1** Banded sand snake (*Chilomeniscus cinctus*)

The second record (878 m) was from the west side of the Rincons on 19 February 2002. The snake was found dead in a small rock-sided pool less than 1 m deep in a rocky canyon and collected by DES. Vegetation in the area consisted of perennial shrubs such as honey mesquite and foothills palo verde (*Parkinsonia microphylla*), as well as saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*) and other cacti. A dry earthen cattle tank with silty and sandy soil was located <50 m away.

These observations confirm that banded sand snakes do occur in rocky upland habitat in the Sonoran Desert and at higher elevations than we might expect. The higher elevation specimen (1180 m) is possibly an elevational record for the species.

Enderson (2000) also described a banded sand snake in rocky upland habitat at 3035 feet (925 m), swimming in a rock pool. He speculated that the snake had fallen into the rock pool while searching for water and could not escape. A similar event seems possible for our rock pool record as well; a lack of recent rainfall indicates the snake was not washed into the pool by a flood.

Both observations occurred during winter months. Sand snakes are well-known to be winter active at lower elevations in the Sonoran Desert. Our observations suggest that they are winter active at higher elevations as well.

### Literature Cited

- Enderson, E.F. 2000. Notes on a swimming banded sand snake (*Chilomeniscus cinctus*). *Sonoran Herpetologist* 13:115.
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