

ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Animal Abstract

Element Code: ARADB24010

Data Sensitivity: Yes

**CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE**

**NAME:** *Oxybelis aeneus*

**COMMON NAME:** Brown vinesnake, Mexican vinesnake, Tropical vinesnake

**SYNONYMS:** *Dryinus aeneus*, *Oxybelis microphthalmus*

**FAMILY:** Serpentes: Colubridae

**AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION:** J. Wagler, Franc. Seraph. Hubschmanni, Manachii.  
1824.

**TYPE LOCALITY:** Ega (=Tefe') on the Amazon River near junction of Rio Tefe' in Amazonas  
state of Brazil.

**TYPE SPECIMEN:**

**TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS:** Four species in genus, U.S. to Brazil.

**DESCRIPTION:** A mildly venomous (not dangerous), and extremely thin-bodied snake that closely resembles a vine, with a very narrow head that is pointed and elongated. Total length ranges from 30 – 60 inches (76-152 cm). Stebbins (1966) reports average length of 36 - 48 inches (91-122 cm). An average four foot long male weighs about 1.27 oz. Coloration consists of light gray/brown on back with occasional dark brown/black flecking. The underside is light yellow-green coloration below the head and neck, grading to light gray-white toward the tail. A thin dark-brown line runs from near the nostril, through the eye, to the side of the neck. Scales are smooth and in 17 rows. The anal plate is divided.

**AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION:**

**ILLUSTRATIONS:** Black and white drawing (Stebbins 1966: plate 34; 1985: plate 40)

Color photo (Lowe et. al. 1986: 83)

Color photos (Tom Brennan 2002,

<http://www.reptilesfaz.com/h-o-aeneus.html>)

Color photo

([http://home.earthlink.net/~itec5/Sepentes/Colubridae/Oxybelis\\_aeneus.html](http://home.earthlink.net/~itec5/Sepentes/Colubridae/Oxybelis_aeneus.html))

Color photo (California Academy of Sciences 2001,

<http://elib.cs.berkeley.edu/cgi/>)

Color photos (John White 2003, <http://elib.cs.berkeley.edu/cgi/>)

**TOTAL RANGE:** Extreme south-central Arizona south through Mexico to southeastern Brazil, and Peru and Bolivia.

**RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA:** South-central Arizona. Arivaca Lake, and Tumacacori, Pajarito and Patagonia mountains, Santa Cruz County. Isolated records from Santa Rita and Baboquivari mountains.

### **SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS**

**BIOLOGY:** A diurnal snake that is most active in the morning or late afternoon. They are good climbers, spending most of their time in the trees where they are quite difficult to spot. When traveling on the ground, this snake holds its head high. They may sleep at night on top of low bushes (Stebbins 1985). They are inactive in cold temperatures.

**REPRODUCTION:** The Brown vinesnake lays a clutch of 3-5 eggs in late spring to early summer, in an underground burrow or den. Incubation lasts about 2.5 months.

**FOOD HABITS:** They consume chiefly plant-inhabiting lizards, but also frogs, birds and insects. They catch lizards on the ground or in trees. They inject prey with an immobilizing venom, from grooved rear teeth.

**HABITAT:** In Arizona, this snake inhabits brush covered hillsides, canyons and stream bottoms with sycamore, oak, walnut and wild grape. In habitats south of Arizona, they prefer arid and moist tropical forests.

**ELEVATION:** In Arizona, the elevation ranges from about 3,000 - 5,800 feet (915 - 1,769 m).

**PLANT COMMUNITY:** Riparian deciduous woodland. One locality was in a mesquite (*Prosopis*) grassland interspersed with oak (*Quercus*), catclaw (*Acacia greggii*), and some manzanita (*Arctostaphylos*), on south exposed slope of about 25°. Another observation was reported on rocky slopes with oak/grass and some manzanita. Other vegetation that it has been associated with include: sycamore (*Platanus*), velvet ash (*Fraxinus velutina*), and Fremont cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*).

**POPULATION TRENDS:** Unknown. Seems to be less common in Sycamore Canyon than a few years ago.

**SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION****ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS:****STATE STATUS:**

WSC (AGFD, WSCA in prep)  
[State Candidate (AGFD, TNW 1988)]

**OTHER STATUS:**

Not Forest Service Sensitive (USDA, FS  
Region 3 1999)  
[Forest Service Sensitive (USDA, FS  
Region 3 1988)]

**MANAGEMENT FACTORS:** Threats include brush clearing and wood cutting.

**PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:**

**SUGGESTED PROJECTS:** Distribution, habitat, population and life history studies.

**LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:** USFS – Coronado National Forest.

**SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION****REFERENCES:**

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**MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:**

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**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** The subspecies *aeneus* and *auratus* have been synonymized (see Keiser 1982).

**Revised:** 1991-04-09( )  
1998-01-30 (SMS)  
2003-04-03 (SMS)

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