

EARLY ACTIVITY OF *STORERIA DEKAYI* IN JEFFERSON COUNTY, KANSAS

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Records of snakes emerging early from hibernation are useful for establishing species' potential activity seasons. In discussing the habits of *Storeria dekayi*, Fitch (1999) attributed to this cold-tolerant species an activity season from "as early as mid-March and . . . as late as mid-November."

On 10 February 2009 at 1400hrs CST, we collected 9 *Storeria dekayi* (6 adult, m:f=4:2; and, 3 juvenile m:f=2:1) from beneath an artificial shelter tin covering an ant nest (*Formica subsericea*) on the Jefferson County tract described by Pisani 2005. An additional adult escaped. A juvenile male *Thamnophis sirtalis* (257mm SVL) was also collected. Three of the adult male *S. dekayi* were recaptures, having been marked at the same site in late October 2008 by GRP. The nest, which is active, is used as a hibernaculum by several small snake species and at least one juvenile of a moderate-sized one—*T. sirtalis* (Pisani 2009).

The shelter station is part of a series of transects of shelters, and is located in regrown woods 10m from the edge of an extensive CRP grass tract. The snakes were released at site of capture as part of ongoing study of *Virginia valeriae* and sympatric species. A search of neighboring shelter stations 10m south, 20m east and west, as well as 20m, 40m, and 60m north revealed no other reptiles. Nor were any observed under plywood at any of the stations. Air temperatures for the preceding two days had been unseasonably warm, with highs ca. 20°C and lows of ca 4°C. The tin, located as it is in deciduous woodland, receives direct sunlight during mid-day and typically is warmer than ambient; this doubtless is a factor in the early activity observed at the ant nest hibernaculum.

Taggart et al. (2008) include for completeness a very early record of 11 January 1928 for *S. dekayi*

based upon two specimens collected by H.K. Gloyd (MVZ 14884, 14885) from Manhattan (Riley County) Kansas, approximately the latitude of the present study. However, Gloyd's accompanying data indicate that these snakes were "Dug up by construction crew." The snakes we describe here were undisturbed emergents.

Two of the adult *Storeria dekayi* described here eliminated uric acid crystals during handling. No defecations were noted, and no earthworms or other suitable early prey were noted beneath any of the shelters checked. As in previous seasons, ants remained dormant at this time. During the 2007 typical field season, the earliest *S. dekayi* collections were 8 March, and the earliest defecations recorded were 17 March.

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