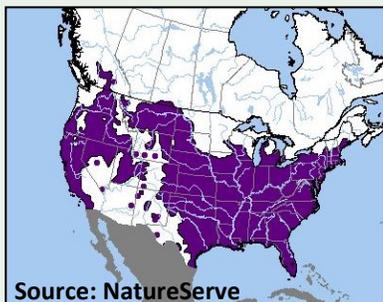


# North American Racers and the Department of Defense

The North American Racer (*Coluber constrictor*) is a non-venomous snake that is widely distributed across North America. This species is the most common snake confirmed present on military properties. It gets its name from the quickness by which it moves.

**Description:** North American Racers are slender snakes that typically reach total lengths of 36-60 inches (90 –152 cm). The color of adults ranges from uniform glossy black, brown, gray to blue, with lighter colors on the belly such as white, light gray, or yellow. Adults often have white with dark markings on their chin and throat. Juveniles are typically colored gray and strongly patterned with dark-gray, brown, or reddish-brown blotches. The pattern of juveniles fades and eventually



Source: NatureServe

disappears by three years of age.

**Range:** This species ranges from a few areas of southernmost Canada, south through most of the United States (exclusive of the Desert Southwest, higher elevations of the Rocky Mountains, and most of the northernmost areas near the Canadian border), to northern and eastern Mexico, and unevenly southward to Guatemala and Belize. Eleven subspecies are recognized.

**Habitat:** North American Racers are habitat generalists, and may be found in grasslands, prairies, shrublands, open woodlands, sandhills, streamsides, and semi-agricultural areas. They thrive in habitats with lots of thick, low-level vegetation, including regenerating timber clearcuts.

**Behavior:** This snake is active during the day. They are good climbers and can be found in shrubs and small trees. Prey items consist of insects, small rodents, lizards, snakes, frogs, salamanders, and birds. Prey is bitten and swallowed alive without constriction, contrary to its scientific name. This snake generally flees when encountered. When threatened, it may vibrate its tail, which when in dry vegetation, produces a sound similar to that made by a rattlesnake rattle.

**Military Interactions:** The most common snake species confirmed present on DoD properties. This snake is typically encountered both in military training and housing areas. These snakes have large home ranges, and movements of up to 1.6 km have been recorded.

**Conservation Status:** This species has no federal conservation status. It is state-endangered in Maine and state-threatened in New Hampshire and Vermont. Several subspecies are considered state Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).

**Threats/Planning Considerations:** Threats to this species include destruction and fragmentation of habitats, human persecution, road mortality, and forest succession. A habitat management practice to benefit this species is to restore and/or maintain patches of young forest and shrubland.



Picture by: Seth Berry

## Occurrence on Military Lands

Confirmed	Potential
Confirmed present on 169 military properties (34 Air Force; 82 Army; 11 Marine Corps; and 42 Navy).	Up to an additional 122 military properties (43 Air Force; 47 Army; 1 Marine Corps; and 31 Navy).

