



# Corn Snake

*Elaphe guttata*

Corn snakes may get their name from the maize corn patterns that adorn their slender bodies. Or perhaps the name stems from the snake's habit of visiting cornfields or grain stores in search of mice. No matter what the origin of the name is, the corn snake's dazzling colors and intricate patterns make them popular in the pet trade. In fact, the first corn snakes many people ever see are at pet shops or reptile shows. A variety of "cultivated" forms, including "albino corns," "Okeetee corns," and "creamsicle corns," are available because corn snakes have been bred in captivity for the last two decades. But chances are that none of these cultivars can compare to the beautiful serpent that is probably living wild in the woods near your house. The prettiest corn snakes I've ever seen were wild individuals in their natural habitat.

Corn snakes, or "red rat snakes" as they are often called, breed in the spring shortly after winter hibernation is over. By May or June, females will lay 8-25 eggs in underground mammal burrows, rotten logs, or other suitable nesting sites. The eggs incubate for 60-80 days before hatching. Because baby corn snakes are only a foot long when they hatch, the hatchlings must feed on small prey such as lizards, treefrogs, and other small animals to survive. The small hatchlings themselves may be especially susceptible to predation by birds, raccoons, skunks, and other predators.

Corn snakes are powerful constrictors. Adult snakes feed on mice, rats, birds, and lizards by suffocating the prey with their strong coils. Food items are swallowed whole and digested efficiently. Corn snakes are accomplished climbers as well as adept burrowers, so most small mammals or birds are possible meals for them. Many people recognize the value of corn snakes as an effective (and free!) exterminator, because the snakes feed on pesky rodents around houses or farms.

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Photos by David Scott. Written by Tony Mills.  
Layout and Design by Lindy Nowak.

