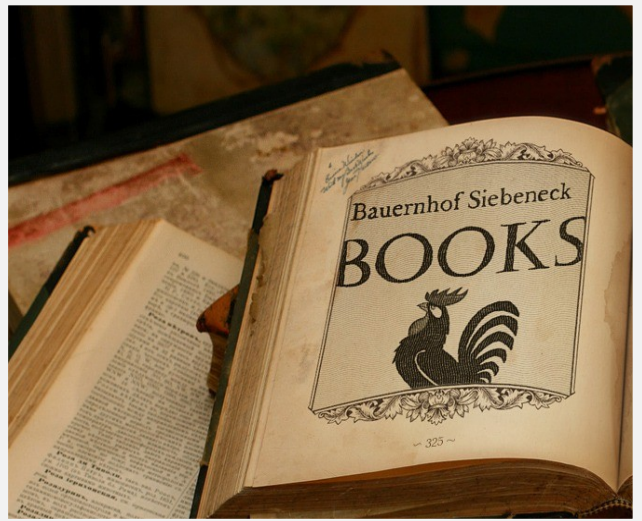


Scientific Classification

Kingdom: **Animalia**
Phylum: **Chordata**
Subphylum: **Vertebrata**
Class: **Reptilia**
Order: **Squamata**
Suborder: **Serpentes**
Family: **Colubridae**
Subfamily: **Colubrinae**
Tribe: **Lampropeltini**
Genus: ***Pantherophis***
Species: ***P. obsoletus***



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"Although the snake cannot fly, he has caught the bird whose home is in the sky." Nigerian Proverb



**Black Snake, Dragon of
the Missouri River Valley**

*Pantherophis
obsoletus et
Galliformes*

What you
should know
about black rat
snakes and
your poultry

Timm Siebeneck

Western Rat Snake

The common and non-venomous black rat snake or *Pantherophis obsoletus* is a *colubrid species* and may also be referred to as chicken snake, western rat snake, *schwarze Schlange* (Amish- and Midwestern German dialects), pilot snake or simply black snake. It behaves as a constrictor in the sense that it strangles its victim by means of encircling its prey in the shape of a corkscrew. It inhabits densely forested regions, especially those near rivers or large streams. It is a merciless hunter and extremely clever at gaining access to outbuildings, houses, brush piles and the like. The black snake is an accomplished climber and is capable of climbing vertical structures. It emits an unpleasant odor when cornered and consumes small animals such as



The Western Rat Snake

rodents and birds. It considers eggs and young, nested birds a delicacy. This snake and may grow between six and eight feet long and is beneficial to the ecosystem of Missouri. However, *Pantherophis obsoletus* plays a starring role as a nuisance to poultry and small game farmers.

Habits and characteristics of *Pantherophis obsoletus*:

1. Can climb a wall
2. Will chase if attacked
3. Emits a foul odor
4. Can maneuver into the smallest areas
5. Will squeeze right eagerly into any opening
6. Can kill a seven-pound rooster.
7. The head of its victim is wet and appear sucked if the prey is too large to be digested
8. Can rear up like cobra
9. Has extremely tough skin
10. No longer eats rodents when easy prey such as poultry are available.
11. If it is frightened or finds itself in eminent danger the snake can regurgitate its dinner in order to lighten its load.
12. Comes out in extremely warm weather or during a drought
13. hibernates in winter in the same dens as copperheads and rattlesnakes
14. vibrate its tail on dry leaves in order to imitate the rattle of a rattlesnake
15. younger snakes may have brown patterned skin
16. can gain freedom even when almost flattened by an object

If you cross paths with any snake, the best course of action is to allow the serpent to go about its business unharmed. Snakes are beneficial in controlling rodent populations and can be advantageous to those who do not raise small livestock.

If the common black snake or schwarze Schlange has become a nuisance animal, contact your local wildlife professional or conservation agent who may safely remove and transport it to a new, distant location.

If the clever serpent has gained access to your poultry structures, the animal must be relocated or eliminated. Once a chicken snake knows a reliable food source, he will return when the need for sustenance arises.

If there are animal dens or entrenched areas under outbuildings on your property, it is possible that a slither of snakes exists and may keep you and your poultry quite busy. Often the only way to eliminate a knot of snakes is to have a professional exterminator handle the removal.