

The Apparent Persistence of *Crotalus horridus* in the Western Piedmont of North Carolina

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Timber Rattlesnakes (*Crotalus horridus*) are imperiled over much of their range and efforts are underway to protect them in many states (Brown 1993). Consequently, documentation of remaining populations is vital for their conservation. In North Carolina, most extant populations of *C. horridus* occur in the mountainous (western) and coastal (eastern) regions (Palmer and Braswell 1995). Legislation is proposed that will make the snake a "Species of Special Concern" in North Carolina, affording protection from wanton killing and collection (R. Wilson and A. L. Braswell, pers. comm.).

The Piedmont of North Carolina has experienced extensive development since initial European settlement resulting in the extirpation of most *C. horridus* populations (W. H. Martin, pers. comm.). In the Western Piedmont of North Carolina, the only documented records of *C. horridus* are from Crowder's Mountain State Park in western Gaston County, Morrow Mountain State Park

in eastern Stanly County, central Union County, and an observation regarded as reliable from eastern Lincoln County (Brown 1992; Palmer and Braswell 1995). Here we document the apparent persistence of *C. horridus* in the western Piedmont of North Carolina by reporting two new county records from northern Mecklenburg County and adjacent, western Cabarrus County.

Crotalus horridus (Timber Rattlesnake). MECKLENBURG Co: Ramah Creek Conservation Easement, 3.0 km S of U.S. Rt. 73 on McAuley Road (UTM Zone 17: N3920589m, E0519984m). August 1997. Gary Sitton. NCSM 61877. Verified by Jeffrey C. Beane. New county record. The specimen was obtained by Sitton, who placed the specimen in a freezer until 28 May 2001, when we obtained it. The individual is a female measuring 1.37 m long and resembles Coastal Plain ("canebrake") forms. An additional specimen was found during June 1997 in the vicinity of the first animal (ca. 2.5 km S of U.S. Rt. 73 on McAuley Road—UTM Zone 17: N3920575m, E0519978m) in June 1997 by Margaret Zimmerman. This specimen was killed and all but its rattle discarded. The Ramah Creek Conservation Easement, where both of these specimens were found, encompasses 202 ha of undeveloped land and represents one of the largest undeveloped areas in northern Mecklenburg County. Habitat consists of mixed hardwoods and pine interspersed with a few feed plots established for deer and quail. We searched the area extensively during 2000 and 2001, and failed to find additional specimens.

CABARRUS Co: 8480 Bradford Road, Concord, North Carolina, 1.5 km N of North Carolina Rt. 73 (UTM Zone 17: N3924608m, E0526246m). 22 September 2000. Debbie Bradford. NCSM Color Slide WMP 5346. Verified by Jeffrey C. Beane. New county record. The specimen was reported in the *Concord Independent Tribune* to be between 1.3 and 1.5 m long. A second specimen was killed adjacent to North Carolina Rt. 73 on a boat ramp between LA Forest Road and Rankin Road (UTM Zone 17: N3924589m, E0526220m). July 2000. Deputy Sheriff Rick Coker. NCSM Color Slide WMP 5347. Verified by Jeffrey C. Beane. From photographs, this specimen appears to also be between 1.3 and 1.5 m long. As with the Ramah Creek specimens, these animals resemble more closely the Coastal Plain ("canebrake") form of this species. The area where these two specimens were found is comprised of a mosaic of various habitats, consisting of small farms interspersed with forested areas and stream floodplains.

LITERATURE CITED

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