



See Me. News 11 Aug 1983

Ground snakes can be an asset

by Christina Quick

A friend told me a snake got caught in his pool skimmer. It died, and he asked me if I could identify it. It was pencil-thin, about 8 inches long, greyish-brown with a red stripe the full length.

I said I had a book that would identify it. After checking my "Audubon Guide to North American Reptiles and Amphibians" (I looked under both two-toned and striped snakes), I called my friend and read about ground snakes — *Sonora semianulata*. We were sure of it. This tiny, glassy snake is 8-19 inches long. There is a great variation in

the back pattern: it can have red, orange or beige back stripe or be crossbanded, ranging from a single neck band to evenly spaced, saddle-shaped blotches, to bands with interspaces encircling the body. It mates spring and fall, and the young are 4-5 inches long.

They like open areas with loose, sandy soil, mesquite thickets along river banks, and brushy desert areas to 6,000 feet. This is a secretive burrowing snake, and it is not poisonous.

My friend thanked me and was ready to hang up. I said, "Just a minute, I haven't told you the best part! They prey on scor-

pions, spiders, centipedes and insects." So many people think only 'kill, kill' when they see a snake, that they fail to realize that this snake may be a definite asset to have around the yard.

Due to its diminutive size and seclusive burrowing habits, ground snakes are observed less frequently in the foothills area than some of their larger, more active diurnal relatives. Although a variety of snake species do inhabit our locality, the most likely to be commonly seen are the red racer, kingsnake, bull or gopher snake and the western diamond-back rattlesnake.