

PANTHEROPHIS OBSOLETUS

OBSOLETUS (black rat snake): FEEDING OBSERVATION. The North American rat snake (*P. obsoletus*) is a climber that forages in trees for bird's nests and squirrels (Ernst, & Ernst, 2003). Although predation on bird's eggs is common (Ernst & Ernst, 2003), reports of simultaneous predation on a bird's nest by two foraging *P. obsoletus* have not been reported. During a visit to Pennsylvania, United States in June 2013, a pair of *P. obsoletus* with estimated lengths of over 1 m were observed predating on nestlings of the American Robin, *Turdus migratorius* (Harrison, 1975; Baicich, & Harrison, 1997). The predation event is shown in Fig. 1 and the location of the nest which was situated on the sill above the front door of a property on Kensington Drive, Port Matilda, State College, Pennsylvania (approximate co-ordinates: 40° 47' 29" N 77° 51' 31" W) (is shown in Fig 2). The house was situated in an area with extensive open areas, dense deciduous woodland, network of small ponds and scrub areas and is typical rat snake habitat (Ernst & Ernst, 2003). The snakes were later removed to the surrounding woodland. Further observations of foraging *P. obsoletus* were observed within the grounds of the property on two additional occasions (12 and 17 June) but it is not known if these were the same individuals. Blouin-Demers and Weatherhead (2001) have suggested that forest clearing has increased the available edge habitat that is preferred by *P. obsoletus* for thermoregulation, and that this inadvertently increases contact between the snakes and nesting birds.

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Figure 1. A pair of *P. obsoletus* predating on chicks of the American Robin *T. migratorius* in Port Matilda, Pennsylvania, USA.

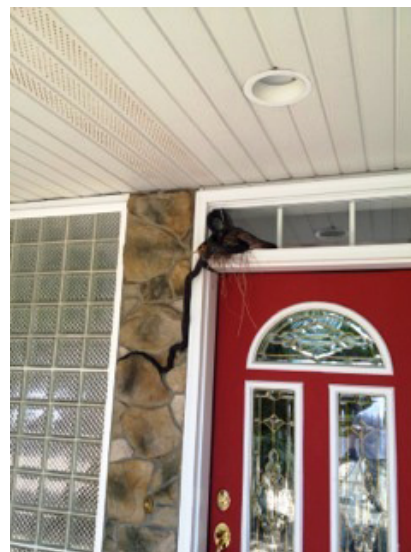


Figure 2. Photograph illustrating both the predation event and climbing abilities of *P. obsoletus*.

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