

Lampropeltis getula californiae (California kingsnake): Juvenile aggregation

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At approximately 1515h on 16 November 2014, four juvenile *Lampropeltis getula californiae* were observed aggregated in a cluster on the north side of the lower Pine Ridge Trail in the Ventana Wilderness of the Los Padres National Forest near Big Sur Station, California (within 1 kilometer of 36.247686°N, 121.751531°W, datum: WGS84, elev. = between 400-500 m) (Fig. 1).

The snakes moved slowly over each other while tongue-flicking. The individuals appeared very similar in length (total length 33-38 cm), which is similar to total hatchling length previously reported for this species (Tu et. al., 2002) of 32.6cm mean total length at hatching to 35.9cm mean total length at 25-78 days after hatching. Thus, these snakes were presumably recent hatchlings, though it is impossible to determine if they were clutchmates. Size-assortative aggregation has been reported previously in snakes (Gregory, 2004), though documentation of this behaviour in this species was not found in the literature.

The snakes were found on a steep northwest-facing slope, which had a high degree of shrub and tree cover. The sky was mostly clear. Ambient air temperature was 15-20°C at 1-2m height above ground. The snakes were in a location that likely received direct sunlight for much of the afternoon. Perhaps

the snakes were basking in sunlight, and then aggregated as the sun dropped behind the hills. Such aggregation might very briefly retard heat loss as the sun set, but is unlikely to result in significant heat retention, especially for such small snakes.

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Figure 1: Aggregation of *L. g. californiae* (California kingsnake). Photograph by Michael Powers.