

Herpetological Review

FARANCIA ERYTROGRAMMA (Rainbow Snake). **HABITAT.**

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canadensis) dams reduced what little flow existed in some canals to standing quagmires more representative of the habitat selected by Eastern Mudsnakes (*Farancia abacura*; Neill 1964, *op. cit.*). Interestingly, one *A. rostrata* was observed near BNS, but none was captured within the swamp. It is possible that Rainbow Snakes leave bordering fluvial habitats in pursuit of young eels that wandered into canals and swamp habitats.

Capturing such a secretive and uncommon species as *F. erythrogramma* in unexpected habitat encourages consideration of their delicate ecological niche. Declining population indices for American Eels along the eastern United States are attributed to overfishing, parasitism, habitat loss, pollution, and changes in major currents related to climate change (Hightower and Nesnow 2006. Southeast. Nat. 5:693–710). Eel declines could negatively impact population sizes and distributions of Rainbow Snakes, especially in inland areas. We believe future studies based on confirmed Rainbow Snake occurrences from museum records or North Carolina GAP data could better delineate the range within North Carolina. Additionally, sampling for American Eels to determine their population status and distribution in North Carolina could augment population and distribution data for Rainbow Snakes.

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Farancia erythrogramma is a secretive, nocturnal species occurring in southeastern USA (Gibbons and Dorcas 2005. Snakes of the Southeast. University of Georgia Press, Athens, Georgia. 253 pp.). In North Carolina, this species can be found throughout the coastal plain (Palmer and Braswell 1994. Reptiles of North Carolina. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. 412 pp.) and usually inhabits clear, fluvial water systems with low turbidity, neutral pH, and standing vegetation for cover (Neill 1964. Amer. Midl. Nat. 71:257–295). However, past research revealed this species can occur in standing freshwater habitats, such as Carolina bays (Gibbons et al. 1977. Herpetologica 33:276–281).

During a study of the reptile and amphibian community at Bull Neck Swamp (35.96667°N, 076.41667°W), one *F. erythrogramma* was captured with an aquatic funnel trap. Bull Neck Swamp (BNS) is a 2428-ha pocosin wetland located 28 km E of Plymouth, North Carolina, USA, and is managed by the Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences Program at North Carolina State University.

The highly turbid canals of tannic flows and thick bottom debris that meander throughout BNS were an unexpected habitat to discover *F. erythrogramma*, which prefer clear, moving water (Neill 1964, *op. cit.*). Neill (*op. cit.*) maintained that consistent temperatures of stream habitats were important for thermoregulation. Also, fluvial habitats provide cover for American Eels (*Anguilla rostrata*) and Neill (*op. cit.*) suggested the predominant diet on *A. rostrata* further supported the constraint of *F. erythrogramma* to these habitats. However, steep, sandy canal banks prevented the growth of standing vegetation, which likely reduced refuge and staging habitats for nocturnal foraging. Further, Beaver (*Castor*