

Scarlet Kingsnake

Lampropeltis triangulum

Scarlet kingsnakes are arguably among the most beautiful of all snakes. Their vibrant colors and small size make them the consummate jewels of the local ecosystem. These harmless snakes rarely get more than two feet long. They feed on a variety of small animals including lizards, small snakes and newborn mice. Scarlet kings are rarely encountered because they are very secretive. They spend their days under bark and other debris, moving overland at night. They are usually found in open pine woods, but will occasionally occupy other habitats as well. These snakes are similar in coloration to the venomous coral snake. Some scientists believe that scarlet kings mimic coral snakes, thus protecting themselves from some predators. There is a famous rhyme that people use to differentiate between the two snake species. "Red on yellow, kill a fellow. Red on black, friend of jack." This little ditty has to do with the order of the colored bands on these snakes. At the Savannah River Ecology Lab, we usually say, "If you have to remember the rhyme, you shouldn't pick up the snake!" Scarlet kings lay 2-6 eggs in May or June, underground or in rotten logs. The babies (miniscule replicas of the adults) emerge about two months later. Scarlet kings are great examples of "hidden biodiversity" (animal and plant species that are present but rarely seen). SREL researchers use special traps designed to capture secretive species so they can do accurate assessments of which animals are present in particular habitats.



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*This information is provided by **Savannah River Ecology Laboratory Outreach** and **SPARC**.
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