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Sent: Thursday, July 03, 2014 3:26 PM
To: Mike Cardwell [mailto:mikecardwell@comcast.net]
Subject: Rattlesnake update

Hi all,

Well, there's been lots of movement by two animals (#37 & 38) and Jamie's #35 really likes hanging around the Maidu village and ponds! You'll notice that I moved him again on 29 June and he went right back. I'm really interested in how much they are moving around at night. The movement map is becoming a pretty congested, so I've deleted the text from all but the last few days' locations, plus a few older ones of particular interest. Of course, we have less than 2 months' data on #35, the animal we radio-tagged first, so these snakes may well fill in other areas they use, too.

There have been two observations of particular interest in recent days: Last Sunday morning, 29 June, I found a female turkey following our #37 rattlesnake, who was crawling quite rapidly and obviously stressed (see photo below). Unfortunately, the turkey became distracted within a minute or two by my presence and the snake was able to escape while the turkey watched me. I would really like to have seen what that encounter produced. Since turkeys are omnivores, I suspect they prey on baby snakes, maybe including rattlers, but this turkey was careful to stay out of reach of this adult rattlesnake. Interestingly, just a little more than 24 hours later, Jaclyn saw this rattlesnake under the amphitheater stage - an overnight move of 229 meters (or 250 yards)! Since he had been hunting in the same small area for several days, you have to wonder if the turkey encounter stimulated the big move.

The following morning, 1 July, this same male had moved a short distance and was out of sight under an old dry log on the hillside above to the amphitheater. He was still there this morning but when I approached, a rattlesnake retreated from basking in the early sun. Although our #37's radio signal indicates he is still there, the rattle of the basking snake this morning was not marked with paint (see bottom photo). While it's a little late for spring courtship (based on previous years' data), it is also very unusual to find two males together.

Several people have asked me recently if rattlesnakes stake out a territory. The short answer is no. However, they do have what we call a "home range" where they can almost always be found year after year but they do not defend it. In fact, individual home ranges overlap a lot. The only agonistic behavior we know of between rattlesnakes occurs when two males compete over access to a nearby receptive female during the courtship season (e.g., the "dancing rattlesnake" video on the EYNC website).

I know that's a little long-winded. You guys are always welcome to call or email with questions.

Best,

Mike



