

4 September 2014

Hello all,

Just a short message to announce that we have kids! Our female #39 has delivered her babies 3 to 4 weeks earlier than any of the litters we documented in El Dorado County and consistent with timing of births in southern California.

Also of great interest is the presence of a second unmarked adult rattlesnake with her. It may be the same one we have had glimpses of in recent weeks at this refuge. I have attached one minute of video (mp4 format; 9.6 MB) from tonight in which you'll see our mom (#39) in the foreground with her head up. Behind her, you'll see two of her kids laying on top of the other unmarked adult. This other adult does not look like another pregnant female. If it is a male, it is the second time we have seen a male hang out with a pregnant female and then found the kids laying on top of the male. Nobody has ever documented paternal accompaniment of baby rattlesnakes, although we know that mom will stay with her litter until they shed the first time about 7-10 days postpartum. If this is a male, he's probably just there to mate with mom after she gives birth and the kids on top of him may just be coincidental. Nonetheless, we'll try hard to get our hands on him for a blood sample and later genetic analysis.

I palpated 6 fetuses in #39 two months ago. She probably has more than the two kids but one passage in the refuge makes a sharp 90 degree left turn and that's where she hangs out and where the one baby disappears in the video. I cannot make the sharp turn with the BurrowCam but we will probably see more of the kids as they get more active. I'm not sure exactly how long ago she delivered them but we'll get a better idea when their eyes turn gray; their eyes are still clear now.

FYI, female #41 was still plump and appeared to be alone tonight.

ALSO; I have been unable to get a radio signal on our male #36 since last Sunday. The most likely explanation is that his radio has failed prematurely. His rattle is marked with red/red (i.e., there is no other color). If someone comes across him, please catch him, put him in the barrel in the shop, and call or text me. As mentioned before, other marked rattlesnakes can be moved and released as usual; just let me know what colors you see, top and bottom, in the rattle and when and where you released the snake (so I don't count it as a natural move). Thanks!

More later.

Mike