

Rare four-foot rainbow snake spotted in Florida for the first time in 50 years

The rainbow snake has not been seen in Florida since 1969
Now, two women hiking through Ocala National Forest stumbled upon one. Experts say change in water levels of the Rodman Reservoir forced the snake out

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DAILYMAIL.COM
25 February 2020

It was last seen in 1969, but the rare rainbow snake has made its return to Florida.

Two women spotted the stunning four-foot long creature while hiking in the Ocala National Forest, which sits 47 miles north of Orlando.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) said rainbow snakes 'are highly-aquatic, spending most of their life hidden among aquatic vegetation; seldom seen, even by herpetologists, due to their cryptic habits.'

However, the organization speculates the recent change in water levels of the Rodman Reservoir forced the snake out of hiding.



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Tracey Cauthen and Rebecca Boyer were hiking through the Ocala National Forest when they stumbled upon a four-foot rainbow snake.

'Tracey hale Cauthen and I came across this gorgeous critter,' Boyer shared in a Facebook post.

The rainbow snake, also nicknamed ‘eel moccasin’ is painted with iridescent, blue-black back, yellow and red patches and three red stripes down its body. Adults average about 40 to 54 inches – with the largest on record measuring 66 inches



The snakes live mostly in hiding under floating vegetation and burrowing near creeks, lakes, marshes and tidal flats.

This type of behavior makes them an uncommon sight, even for herpetologists, those who study amphibians and reptiles, the agency said.

The Florida Museum of Natural History also noted that rainbow snakes are nonvenomous and harmless.

The Center for Biological Diversity in Florida petitioned to protect the South Florida rainbow snake under the Endangered Species Act in 2010, along with 403 other imperiled Southeast freshwater species.

But in response, the next year the federal government deemed the elusive snake extinct — without conducting the thorough survey needed to back up such a declaration about the cryptic creature.

Following the rejection, the Center offered up a \$500 reward to anyone who could provide ‘hard evidence of the animal’s existence.’

However, Cuathen’ and Boyd’s sighting is the first in 50 years.

While the snake can be found along the coast from Louisiana to Maryland, most of them are spotted in Florida throughout the Panhandle and northern peninsula, according to the museum.