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Media Notes:
January 29, 2025, kicks off the Year of the Snake / Chinese New Year
February 1, 2025, is National Serpent Day

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Media Kit & Background Information | Images & Logos

The Year of the Snake: A Rallying Cry to Safeguard Declining Snake Populations

National Nonprofit Works on the Ground Across the US for Imperiled Snake Species

UNITED STATES, January 9, 2024 - As snake populations decline at alarming rates, the Year of the Snake (starting on January 29) and National Serpent Day (on February 1) are timely reminders of the urgent need to protect these misunderstood and essential species. The Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy (ARC), a national nonprofit to conserve imperiled wildlife, is answering the call for greater efforts to protect their dwindling populations across the US.

"Despite their importance to ecosystems, snakes remain overlooked and underfunded in conservation efforts," explained ARC Executive Director JJ Apodaca, "and they're also underdogs because of the way they're viewed widely."

One species emblematic of these challenges is the northern pinesnake, a beautiful snake with distinctive splotchy markings native to several Eastern US states. Despite its extensive range, though, this species is in decline. Habitat destruction and other threats have impacted its populations.

Because they spend their lives underground and sport effective camouflage, northern pinesnakes are quite difficult to find, let alone research. However, over the past several years, through techniques such as radiotelemetry, mark-recapture, and remote camera trapping, ARC has made significant strides in studying this species, which in turn, informs the organization's conservation actions for it.

In a groundbreaking moment a few months ago in the Francis Marion PARCA (Priority Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area), South Carolina, ARC biologists tracked two northern pinesnakes to the same location and observed a mating event. They then closely monitored the female from that occurrence,

which was gravid (carrying eggs), and documented the emergence of her hatchlings—a vital observation for understanding the species' reproductive behavior.

This work enables ARC to employ better, more strategic conservation efforts for this imperiled species, including targeted habitat restoration and protection to safeguard the vital areas it uses for breeding and to connect its populations to allow for gene flow.

The southern hognose snake, another species in the same region, is known for its upturned snout and secretive nature. It's increasingly rare, and conservationists have struggled to secure protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for this snake, which was first proposed more than 30 years ago. Despite most recently being denied ESA status in 2019, renewed efforts have led to a re-evaluation, with a decision expected by August of this year.

Like the northern pinesnake, studying southern hognose snakes is no easy task. These snakes also live primarily underground, making them difficult to monitor. ARC is leading efforts to better understand their movements and habitat needs in the Francis Marion PARCA. With these critical data, ARC aims to implement conservation measures and help secure protections that can aid in halting the species' decline.

In the Southwest, species such as the Threatened narrow-headed gartersnake are integral to aquatic ecosystems. ARC's work in the Gila and Bootheel PARCAs of New Mexico and Cochise PARCAs of Arizona focuses on restoring wetland and riparian habitats and combating invasive species to bolster populations of these unique, at-risk snakes.

"Before their decline, snakes like the narrow-headed gartersnake knitted together food webs, acting as the glue between aquatic and terrestrial habitats," said Apodaca. "Their conservation is essential to preserving the balance of their ecosystems."

And this is true for countless snake species across the US. The Year of the Snake and National Serpent Day offer unique opportunities to shift perceptions and rally support for snake conservation. ARC is committed to turning this momentum into action to continue to safeguard these crucial species before it's too late.

About Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy (ARC)
Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy, or ARC, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit focused on identifying and conserving the highest priority places for amphibians and reptiles in the United States. We protect endangered amphibians and reptiles through a strategic, scientific, and passionate approach. We believe the conservation of amphibians, reptiles, and the habitats they depend on is vitally important. To learn more, visit ARCProtects.org.

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