

MCC Biology professor coauthors authoritative book: Snakes of Arizona

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MESA, Arizona -- Dec. 9, 2020 -- Mesa Community College Life Science professor Dr. Andrew Holycross and his colleague, the late Dr. Joseph Mitchell, co-edited and recently published *Snakes of Arizona* (ECO Publishing). Written for naturalists and professional biologists, resource managers, teachers and students, the book examines all aspects of the biology of Arizona's snakes, and is supported by a complete review of the scientific literature plus a trove of previously unpublished data and observations.



Introductory chapters feature Arizona's biotic communities, snake conservation and species of possible occurrence. The 59 peer-reviewed species accounts, authored by leading authorities, comprise the heart of *Snakes of Arizona*. Each account describes one snake species and discusses its taxonomy, distribution and abundance, habitat, diet and foraging biology, predators and parasites, behavior, and reproduction. This essential reference includes over 3,170 unique citations to scientific literature, inviting the reader to further explore the captivating world of the snakes of Arizona.

Dot distribution maps showing where each species have been found in our state are gathered in a concluding chapter co-authored by MCC geography Professor Karen Blevins and former MCC student Kristin Kabat. The logistically challenging mapping project involved plotting over 17,000 records using ArcGIS software. Blevins and Holycross incorporated the mapping project into an advanced MCC Geographic Information Systems (GIS) course (GPH273) offered in the spring of 2015. Ten students, including Kabat, took the class and participated in the real-world project as they learned advanced techniques in GIS. Kabat is now working on her master's degree focused on herpetology in Texas.

Holycross' snake expertise began in the late 1980s as he studied prairie rattlesnakes in the Sandhills of Nebraska. By the early 1990's he was studying rare rattlesnake species in southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico. He is an author of *A Field Guide to Amphibians and Reptiles in Arizona* (Arizona Game and Fish Department), numerous short scientific notes, and more than 25 peer-reviewed scientific publications.

"Our book celebrates the diversity of Arizona's snakes, which includes long and delicate Vine Snakes, little bull-doing Hognose Snakes, earthworm-like Threadsnakes and aquatic specialists like the Narrowheaded Gartersnakes," said Holycross. "Not to mention the 13 glorious species of rattlesnake, the highest diversity of rattlesnakes in any of the United States! All worthy of wonder and conservation."

A copy of *Snakes of Arizona* will be available in both MCC libraries and ECO Wear & Publishing after Dec. 14, 2020.

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