



# A Predation Attempt on Novel Prey by a Northern Pinesnake, *Pituophis m. melanoleucus* (Squamata: Colubridae)

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The genus *Pituophis*, comprised of seven species of large, stout-bodied colubrids that collectively range from southern New Jersey westward into southern Canada and southward through Guatemala, are known predators of rodents and other small mammals at all age classes (e.g., Palmer and Braswell 1995; Werler and Dixon 2000; Ernst and Ernst 2003). However, jumping mice of the genus *Zapus* have not been recorded as prey of *Pituophis*. At 1540 h on 14 July 2023, while conducting surveys for Northern Pinesnakes (*Pituophis m. melanoleucus*) in Ocean County, New Jersey, we encountered a mouse, later identified via Reid (2006) as a Meadow Jumping Mouse (*Zapus hudsonius*) in the coils of a juvenile Northern Pinesnake (total length ~70–75 cm) (Fig. 1). The snake retained its grip on the mouse until one of us stepped away to retrieve a proper camera for documentation, at which time it relaxed its grip, unwound its coils, and rapidly fled down a “dime-sized” hole 3 cm away. After 15 minutes, the snake twice attempted to leave its retreat, presumably to consume the dead mouse. Although we were forced to aban-

don the observation in light of impending thunderstorms, we speculated that once the snake was confident in our absence, it left the burrow and consumed the mouse.

### Acknowledgements

We thank EcolSciences, Inc. for the opportunities to conduct such surveys, and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection’s Endangered and Nongame Species Program for issuing the appropriate scientific collecting permits.

### Literature Cited

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**Figure 1.** A juvenile Northern Pinesnake (*Pituophis m. melanoleucus*) constricting a Meadow Jumping Mouse (*Zapus hudsonius*) in Ocean County, New Jersey, USA (left) and the dead mouse at the entrance to a burrow into which the Northern Pinesnake fled after being disturbed (right). Photographs by Jason A. Fantuzzi.