

WILDLIFE OF VICTORIA PARK

by John Serrao

CORN SNAKE

When I first moved to Victoria Park 8 years ago, I made a commitment to advertise my availability to rescue and relocate snakes from the homes in our community (and nearby areas). It was disturbing to discover that snakes were being indiscriminately killed by residents, staff and landscapers. I wanted to help both the homeowners and the reptiles by capturing the “misguided” snakes and releasing them safely into our conservation areas or nearby forests where they could continue their important ecological roles as predators.

The species that I’ve most commonly been

called to remove from homes is the Corn Snake, or Red Rat Snake. This beautiful, harmless, mostly nocturnal, red, yellow, and gray blotched snake sometimes seeks shelter from cold or hot weather by finding its way indoors. It's an excellent climber and can even get straight up a vertical wall if there are enough rough edges to hold onto with its muscular body. I've rescued Corn Snakes from shelves and cabinets several feet above the floor, and on the cold evening of Jan. 20, I removed one from behind a resident's wall-mounted television!

Corn Snakes are constrictors, killing their prey by wrapping their powerful coils around it. Young Corn Snakes eat lizards and frogs but adults specialize in mice and rats (and will also occasionally prey upon bird nestlings and fledglings). Although non-venomous, a Corn Snake will sometimes strike and bite if grabbed by a person.

For several decades, Corn Snakes have been

bred by people in the reptile trade business, and today it's one of the most popular pets in classrooms, nature centers, zoos, and private homes. Many "designer" colors have been produced by breeders, but, to me, the most beautiful Corn Snakes are the ones living in the wild around central Florida. (call me at 386-218-4018 to remove a snake from your home).