

# SLITHERING THROUGH ST. PATRICK'S DAY

Hailey Isaac  
Racine Zoo AmeriCorps Member



When you think about Saint Patrick's Day what is the first thing that comes to mind? Is it the color green? Shamrocks? Leprechauns and pots of gold? Well what if I told you that another symbol for Saint Patrick's Day (March 17th) is a snake and comes from a legend associated with

St. Patrick himself. Legend has it that St. Patrick was the man responsible for banishing all snakes from the country of Ireland many centuries ago. However, fossil records indicate that snakes actually never lived in Ireland at all! Fortunately, unlike Ireland, we are lucky to have snakes

slithering from coast to coast in the United States. As many may already know, the Racine Zoo is home to various species of snakes (including those that can be found right here in Wisconsin and some from other areas across the world).



A few of the snakes that can be found at the Zoo include ones that are displayed to the public in the Discovery Center, near the Zoo's entrance, such as our two green tree pythons (Laurel and Hardy), our yellow anaconda (Charlie), and our Amazon tree boa, Gigi. Green tree pythons, like our friends Laurel and Hardy, are known for their bright green and yellow colorations and can be found in New Guinea and Australia. The yellow anaconda, like our slithering friend Charlie, is one of the largest species of snake in the world and can be found in parts of South America, such as Brazil and Argentina. Meanwhile, Amazon tree boas, such as our friend Gigi, are found across northern South America and come in a variety of colors and patterns.



Some of the snakes that call the Zoo home are not on display, and are instead used by our Conservation Education Department for educational programs available to people of all ages! These snakes include our Andean milk snake, Andrea, Kenyan sand boa, Fossil, Columbian red-tailed boa, Red, and a western fox snake, Neenah. Andean milk

snakes, like our friend Andrea, originate in the Andes mountain ranges of Columbia and Venezuela and are known to be mimics of the highly venomous coral snake due to their similar color features. Columbian red-tailed boas, like our large friend Red, can weigh upwards of 20 pounds and range from northern Mexico south through Central and South

America. The Kenyan sand boa, like our friend Fossil, often can be found hiding under the sand in desert regions such as those found in East Africa. Last but not least, the western fox snake, such as our friend Neenah, can be found right here in Wisconsin as well as other parts of the midwestern United States! When startled, they may release a mild musk that smells like that of a red fox, hence the common name.



Like many other animals, snakes play a critical role in maintaining balance within an ecosystem since they can be both a predator and prey. More specifically, snakes play an important part in conservation by controlling rodent populations; thereby, helping to limit the spread of diseases. For this reason, I'd like to extend a big thank you to St. Patrick for not banishing all of the snakes across the world! Now that you know a little bit more about our slithering friends, be sure to stop by and visit them the next time you are at the Racine Zoo!