

Piebald Snake Confusion

What's the difference between piebald, pied and pied-sided when describing snakes?

By *Bill Love*

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A new bloodline of blood-red corn snakes has been coined "pied-sided" due to a tendency for the white to show primarily on the snake's belly and sides. Photo by Bill Love / Snake Courtesy Walter Smith.

Q. What's the difference between piebald, pied and pied-sided when describing snakes? I'm seeing all three words used lately and find it very confusing.

Janet King
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A. All those terms refer to the same pigmentation anomaly: piebaldism. Pied is just alternate slang for piebald, the descriptive adjective. It's a genetically controlled trait that prevents colors from filling in where they belong on a normal specimen. White patches are left instead. The trait results in some creatures having a portion of their bodies devoid of color, but others are close to 100 percent stark white.

Ball pythons (*Python regius*) and corn snakes (*Pantherophis guttatus*) are two species that led the way in piebaldism becoming established. This is probably because more people were working with them. I first saw it in a corn snake from the Florida Keys back in the late 1970s, but that bloodline never arose as a viable new morph, apparently due to a fatal gene linked to it.

Piebald ball pythons entered the trade when Peter Kahl produced the first captive-bred examples from an animal imported from Ghana, Africa. His first captive-bred hatchling in 1997 proved the unusual looks were inherited as a simple recessive trait. It, more than any other morph, helped launch the current ball python craze.

In corn snakes, piebaldism has recently been revived in a line of blood-red corns. In this form, the white tends to "hug" the belly and lower sides of the body, initiating the phrase "pied-sided" for the trait as it has manifested itself so far. A similar anomaly also occurs in Persian rat snakes (*Zamenis persica*). Breeders of both species hope their animals eventually capture some of the popularity that piebald ball pythons are presently enjoying.

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