

SNAKES OF NEW JERSEY

Northern Water Snake (*Nerodia sipedon sipedon*)

Identification: 24" - 42". Although commonly mistaken for a water moccasin, the Northern Water Snake is a nonvenomous species. Adult water snakes are highly melanistic, usually brown or black with the remnants of a banding pattern. This pattern is more evident in some specimens than others. Some adults have dark crossbands on the neck and forepart of the body. Young are brilliantly colored in bright reddish-brown bands. Half-moons or stippling may be present on belly. The water snake can exhibit a mean disposition and can inflict a painful, non-venomous bite if carelessly handled, as well as a pungent musk. Scales keeled; anal plate divided.

Where to find them: Northern Water Snakes prefer quiet waters, but can be found in just about any river, stream, pond, lake, swamp, marsh, or bog. They can be seen swimming and foraging as well as basking on land.

When to find them: Active May through October.

Range: Entire state.

Queen Snake (*Regina septemvittata*)

Identification: 15" - 24". The Queen Snake is an uncommon sight. It is a slender, brown aquatic snake with a yellow stripe along lower side of body. Its belly is yellow but marked with four distinct brown stripes, of which the outer two are larger. Although difficult to see, the Queen Snake also has three more narrow, dark stripes running down the length of its back. Scales keeled; anal plate divided.

Where to find them: Queen Snakes are typically found in small rivers and creeks, but can exist in a variety of other aquatic habitats as well. They dwell where crayfish are available and abundant. Queen Snakes are not usually conspicuous baskers, as water snakes are. They are more likely to be found beneath rocks or debris at the water's edge, or swimming.

When to find them: Active May through October.

Range: In a strip along the Delaware River, about 10 miles wide at the Burlington-Mercer County border. It narrows in the Northern Region through Mercer County to include the extreme southern tip of Hunterdon County. In the Southern Region, the range extends to northern Gloucester County riverbank.

Note: There have not been any recorded sightings of the Queen Snake in New Jersey since 1977.

Northern Brown (DeKay's) Snake (*Storeria dekayi dekayi*)

Identification: 9" - 13". The Northern Brown Snake has two parallel rows of blackish spots down the length of its back. A few of the spots may be linked with their partners across the back by narrow lines of dark pigment. The background color of the brown snake varies from light yellowish brown or gray to dark brown or deep reddish brown and its belly is pale yellowish, brownish, or pinkish. The belly remains unmarked except for one or more small black dots at the side of each ventral scale. Scales keeled and in 17 rows; anal plate divided.

Where to find them: Typically will turn up in parks, cemeteries, and beneath trash in empty lots, even in large urban centers, if pollution is not bad, but mainstay of habitat includes bogs, swamps, freshwater marshes, moist woods, and hillsides. The brown snake is not commonly seen because it is so adept at hiding. They are sometimes mistaken for a young garter snake.

When to find them: Active April through October.

Range: Entire state.

Northern Redbelly Snake (*Storeria occipitomaculata occipitomaculata*)

Identification: 8" - 10". The redbelly snake is typically identified by its plain red belly and three pale-colored nape spots. However, this pattern is highly variable. The nape spots are usually well defined. The back of the snake's body is usually a dull shade of brown with traces of four thin, dark stripes or a light middorsal stripe, or both. Many specimens can be gray and a few are even black. In rare cases, the belly of the redbelly snake may be blue-black. Scales keeled and in 15 rows; anal plate divided.

Where to find them: The Northern Redbelly Snake is quite secretive, but often found in or near wooded areas, as well as in or near sphagnum bogs.

When to find them: Active April through September.

Range: Entire state.

Eastern Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis sirtalis*)

Identification: 18" - 26". The Eastern Garter Snake usually has lateral stripes confined to rows of two and three, but this pattern is extremely variable, as is its coloration. Either stripes or a checkered pattern may run the length of its body. Normally, there are three yellowish stripes, but they may vary in color to greenish, brownish, or bluish. The background color of the garter snake varies from black to dark brown to green to olive. Usually, there is a double row of alternating black spots between the stripes. Its belly is greenish or yellowish, with two rows of indistinct black spots. Scales keeled; anal plate single.

Where to find them: A common snake in New Jersey that has a wide range of habitats including meadows, marshes, woodlands, hillsides, and along streams and drainage ditches. It can sometimes be found in city parks and cemeteries.

When to find them: Active April through September.

Range: Entire state.

Eastern Ribbon Snake (*Thamnophis sauritus sauritus*)

Identification: 18" - 26". Ribbon snakes are slim and slender snakes. The three bright stripes, normally yellow in color, are evident against the dark body and tail. The middorsal stripe sometimes has an orange or greenish tinge. Its belly is a plain yellowish or greenish color and its tail is exceptionally long, about 1/3 the total length of the snake. Scales keeled; anal plate single.

Where to find them: This vigorous, slender snake is semi-aquatic and is typically near streams, ponds, bogs, or swamps. If swimming, the ribbon snake stays at the surface instead of diving as water snakes do. If fleeing away, they will skirt the shore.

When to find them: Active April through September.

Range: Entire state.

Eastern Smooth Earth Snake (*Virginia valeriae valeriae*)

Identification: 7" - 10". A small gray or light brownish gray snake lacking any distinct markings. There may be an indication of a faint light stripe down the back. The Eastern Smooth Earth Snake appears ever so slightly keeled, with a light line running through each of its scales, but it is not. Sometimes there are tiny black spots on the back of the snake's body, which can be scattered or arranged in rows. The belly of this snake is plain white or yellowish. Scales smooth or weakly keeled (most keeled near tail) and in 15 rows; anal plate divided.

Where to find them: The smooth earth snake is adept at hiding, and although difficult to find, may be locally common in some areas. They are typically found in disturbed areas near deciduous forests, such as trails, back roads, and abandoned fields.

When to find them: Active April through September.

Range: Entire Southern Region. Monmouth, Middlesex, Mercer, Hudson, Essex, Union, Somerset, and southeastern Morris Counties in the Northern Region.

Eastern Hognose Snake (*Heterodon platyrhinos*)

Identification: 20" - 33". If nothing else, the tendency of the eastern hognose snake to play dead when threatened in any way is key to its identification. The hognose will hiss, spread its head and neck, turn its head upside-down, and stick out its tongue. The hognose snake gets its name from its upturned snout. The eastern hognose can vary in color from a highly melanistic, jet-black individual to one patterned with black blotches on a golden or gray body. The hognose is short in length, but wide in diameter. Its belly is mottled with gray or green on a yellow, light gray, or pinkish background. The underside of its tail is lighter than its belly - easily checked when snake is playing dead. Scales keeled; anal plate divided.

Where to find them: The eastern hognose snake is most often found in a variety of habitats with sandy substrate.

When to find them: April through September.

Range: Entire state.

Northern Ringneck Snake (*Diadophis punctatus edwardsi*)

Identification: 10" - 15". A smooth, dark, slender snake with a golden or orange collar. The back of the snake varies from black to slate to brown and its belly is a uniform shade of yellow. Occasionally, there is a row or partial row of small black dots down the center of its otherwise unmarked belly. Many people believe ringnecks are young racers. Scales smooth; anal plate divided.

Where to find them: Northern Ringneck Snakes are found in woodland areas, typically hiding beneath logs, bark slabs, stones and even trash. In particular, Northern Ringneck Snakes favor cutover wooded areas.

When to find them: Active April through September.

Range: Entire state.

Southern Ringneck Snake (*Diadophis punctatus punctatus*)

Identification: 10" - 14". A ringneck snake, very similar in appearance to the Northern Ringneck Snake, but with two exceptions. First, the Southern Ringneck Snake has a series of black markings, shaped like half-moons, running down the length of its yellow belly in a central row. Second, the neck ring on a Southern Ringneck Snake is normally interrupted by dark pigment. The snake varies in color from black to light brown. Scales smooth; anal plate divided.

Where to find them: Southern Ringneck Snakes are found in much of the same habitat as Northern Ringneck Snakes--near swamps, springs, and on damp wooded hillsides, usually under shelter like a fallen log or a slab of bark. They are most active at night.

When to find them: Active April through September.

Range: All of Southern Region. Southern Monmouth County in Northern Region.

Eastern Worm Snake (*Carphophis amoenus amoenus*)

Identification: 7 1/2" - 11". The Eastern Worm Snake looks very much like a large earthworm. The back of the snake is a dull brown and its belly and one or two adjacent rows of dorsal scales are pink. The Eastern Worm Snake's head is pointed. Scales smooth and opalescent; anal plate divided.

Where to find them: The Eastern Worm Snake is hard to come by as it is almost always hidden and virtually never out and about. It favors moist earth, and is typically found under boards and in rotting logs. The worm snake disappears deep underground in dry weather.

When to find them: Active April through September.

Range: Entire state.

Northern Black Racer (*Coluber constrictor constrictor*)

Identification: 36" - 60". The Northern Black Racer is an entirely black snake with a slender body. Its belly is slightly lighter than its back, usually with a bluish tinge. The iris of a racer's eye is brown or dark amber. The Northern Black Racer hunts with its head held a few inches off the ground. It will flee quickly if approached, with only a glimpse of its tail as it darts off. However, the black racer is also an aggressive snake that does not flee too far. If cornered, it will put up a fierce fight. Juvenile Northern Black Racers are highly patterned with a middorsal row of dark blotches on a gray background. As they grow, black racers lose the blotched pattern and become a uniform black snake. Scales smooth; anal plate divided.

Where to find them: Racers are quite common in fields and open woodlands, as well as occasionally being found in suburban areas.

When to find them: Active April through September.

Range: Entire state.

Rough Green Snake (*Opheodrys aestivus*)

Identification: 22" - 32". The Rough Green Snake is hard to find because of its cryptic coloration and shape. The Rough Green Snake is a small, green, slender snake that is plain light green above and plain white, yellow, or pale greenish below—making it easily mistaken for a vine. Scales keeled; anal plate divided.

Where to find them: Rough Green Snakes spend much of their time climbing, where they easily blend in with the shrubs and vines they are foraging in. Rough Green Snakes are frequently found amongst vegetation overhanging a stream or the edge of a lake.

When to find them: Active April through September.

Range: All of Southern Region. Extreme southern corners of Monmouth County in the Northern Region.

Smooth Green Snake (*Opheodrys vernalis*)

Identification: 11 7/8" - 20". The Smooth Green Snake looks very much like the Rough Green Snake. However, the Smooth Green Snake does not have keeled scales. It is a small snake that is bright green above with a plain white belly that is sometimes washed with pale yellow. Scales smooth; anal plate divided.

Where to find them: Smooth Green Snakes are found primarily in the grass and in other terrestrial habitats where they blend in quite easily.

When to find them: Active April through September.

Range: Northern Region: Sussex, Bergen, Passaic, Essex, Hudson, and northern Warren and Morris Counties.

Corn Snake (*Elaphe guttata guttata*) State Endangered Species

Identification: 30" - 48". The Corn Snake is also known as the "red rat snake". The Corn Snake is a boldly colored snake with red to orange blotches outlined in black on a variable background of gray, brown, or orange. Its belly is distinctly checkered with black and white and the underside of the tail is usually striped. The first blotch on the neck of the Corn Snake divides into two branches that extend forward and meet in a spearpoint between the eyes. Scales weakly keeled; anal plate divided.

Where to find them: The Corn Snake is very rare in New Jersey. It is typically found in sandy, forested areas, as in the New Jersey Pine Barrens. Corn Snakes utilize pine-oak forests with an understory of low brush. They can be found in hollow logs, railroad ties, and foundations of old buildings as well as under boards and logs.

When to find them: Active May through September. Mostly nocturnal, especially during the hot summer months.

Range: Southern Region: Ocean, Atlantic, southeastern Burlington, and northeastern Cumberland Counties.

Black Rat Snake (*Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta*)

Identification: 42" - 72". Like the Northern Black Racer, the Black Rat Snake is a plain, shiny black snake, but sometimes showing traces of a spotted pattern when the skin is distended. Some skin between scales may be white, but these areas are very tiny. Its belly is diffused or clouded with gray or brown on white or a shade of yellow. There is a distinct black and white checkered pattern on the throat of the Black Rat Snake. Juvenile Black Rat Snakes have a pattern of black blotches on a gray background. Scales weakly keeled; anal plate divided.

Where to find them: Black Rat Snakes are found in habitats very similar to that of the Northern Black Racer. They can be found in wooded hillsides and in flat farmlands. The Black Rat Snake is known to climb, and some even dwell in the holes of hollow trees.

When to find them: Active April through September.

Range: Entire state.

Northern Pine Snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus melanoleucus*) State Threatened Species

Identification: 48" - 66". The Northern Pine Snake has dark blotches, usually black or dark brown in color, on a white, gray, or cream colored background. The blotches may get lighter in color towards the tail. It also has a tendency to hiss when threatened or molested. Scales keeled; anal plate single.

Where to find them: The Northern Pine Snake is essentially limited to the sandy habitat of the New Jersey Pine Barrens. It is usually secretive and burrows quite often.

When to find them: Active April through October. Pine snakes can be found throughout the day, but usually in the morning and late afternoon during warm months.

Range: Locally in Southern Region: Ocean, Burlington, Atlantic, and Cape May Counties; eastern Cumberland, Gloucester, and Camden Counties; and southern Monmouth Counties.

Eastern Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getula getula*)

Identification: 36" - 48". The Eastern Kingsnake is a shiny, black snake with distinct links of white or cream. The body is more black than white. Scales smooth; anal plate single.

Where to find them: The Eastern Kingsnake, while found in primarily terrestrial habitats, also favors the banks of streams and the borders of swamps. If necessary, an Eastern Kingsnake will swim to escape. Like most snakes, the Eastern Kingsnake is very secretive and is found under boards and logs.

When to find them: Active April through September.

Range: All of Southern Region except northern Burlington County, and southern Monmouth County in the Northern Region.

Eastern Milk Snake (*Lampropeltis triangulum triangulum*)

Identification: 24" - 36". The Eastern Milk Snake has brown or reddish-brown blotches outlined in black running down the length of its body, with the middorsal blotches being larger than the others. The milk snake USUALLY has a Y-shaped or V-shaped light patch on the nape of its neck, but this is not always the case. The background varies in color from gray to tan. There is a black and white checkered pattern on its belly. Scales smooth; anal plate single.

Where to find them: Milk snakes are found in fields, wooded areas, riverbanks, and rocky hillsides. It is not uncommon to find milk snakes in barns or other outbuildings, where they go in search of rodents.

When to find them: Active April through September.

Range: Entire state.

Scarlet Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum elapsoides*)

Identification: 14" -20". The Scarlet Kingsnake is very much a mimic of the venomous Eastern Coral Snake, but there are a few exceptions that help to identify it as a Scarlet Kingsnake. First, the snout is red, and second, the yellow rings are separated from the red by black. The rings on the Scarlet Kingsnake usually continue across its belly. Scales smooth, in 19 rows at mid-body; anal plate single.

Where to find them: Scarlet Kingsnakes are typically found in or near pine woods where they are hidden under bark and logs. They primarily come out only at night or following a heavy rain.

When to find them: Active April through September.

Range: All of Southern Region. In the Northern Region, southern Monmouth and Mercer Counties.

"Coastal Plain" Milk Snake intergrade (*L. t. triangulum x L. t. elapsoides*)

Identification: The milk snake intergrade is a vibrant snake that looks very much like its two counterparts. It has orange blotches outlined in black on a yellow background. There is typically no Y-shaped or V-shaped blotch on the nape of the neck as there usually is in the eastern milk snake. Because these intergrades are so rare, little is known and their patterns and coloration are considered highly variable.

Where to find them: The "Coastal Plain" Milk Snake is found in habitats similar to that of the Eastern Milk Snake and Scarlet Kingsnake, including woodlands, riverbanks, and outbuildings like barns.

When to find them: Active April through September.

Range: Where the populations of the Eastern Milk Snake and the Scarlet Kingsnake overlap, namely in the Southern region and in southern Monmouth and Mercer Counties in the Northern Region.

Northern Scarlet Snake (*Cemophora coccinea copei*)

Identification: 14" - 20". The Northern Scarlet Snake mimics the Eastern Coral Snake as well. Its belly is white. The red and yellow rings of the Northern Scarlet Snake are separated by black and the snout is red and pointed. The pattern is well defined in young snakes, but in adults, dark spots may appear in the red and especially the whitish areas. Scales smooth; anal plate single.

Where to find them: The Northern Scarlet Snake is found in soil that is suitable for burrowing as they are secretive reptiles. They are usually found under logs and slabs of bark and are rarely seen out above ground.

When to find them: Active April through September. Mostly nocturnal.

Range: Southern Region: all of Atlantic, southern Burlington and Ocean Counties. Locally in Cumberland, Camden, Gloucester, and Monmouth Counties.

Northern Copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortix mokasen*) (VENOMOUS)

Identification: 24" - 36". The copperhead, with its red-brown coloration and darker hourglass bands, is easily camouflaged in the leaf litter of a forest floor. Small, dark spots are frequently present between crossbands and dark, rounded spots can be seen at the sides of its belly. Scales weakly keeled; anal plate single.

Where to find them: Northern Copperheads favor rotting woodpiles in rocky, wooded areas that are usually mountainous. Copperheads will den with other species of snakes in the winter, particularly the timber rattlesnake.

When to find them: Active May through October.

Range: Rocky talus slopes and forest habitats in the Northern Region. These habitats are scattered throughout the Northern Region, but are primarily located in Sussex, Warren, Hunterdon, and Passaic Counties.

WARNING: Do NOT attempt to handle this snake!

Timber Rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*) State Endangered Species—(VENOMOUS)

Identification: 36" - 60". This is the only rattlesnake in New Jersey, and in most of the Northeast. There are 2 color variations in New Jersey: (1) yellow variation: black or dark brown crossbands on a ground color of yellow or brown, the crossbands may be V-shaped and break up into spots down its back; (2) black (melanistic) variation: a heavy stippling of black or very dark brown that hides much of the lighter pigment. It is not unusual to find a completely black individual. Scales keeled; anal plate single.

Where to find them: The Timber Rattlesnake has two distinct populations and habitat requirements in New Jersey, unrelated to their color variation. In northern New Jersey, Timber Rattlesnakes are found in rocky, wooded ledges where they den in south-facing slopes. In the Pine Barrens, the Timber Rattlesnakes have scattered populations in the swamps and pine-oak forests, where they den along riverbeds.

When to find them: Active May through October.

Range: Southern Region: inland Atlantic and Ocean Counties, southern Burlington, eastern Gloucester, and northeastern Cumberland Counties. Northern Region: western Passaic, northern Morris, western Warren and Sussex Counties.

WARNING: Do NOT attempt to handle this snake!

Northern Water Snake (*Nerodia sipedon sipedon*)



Queen Snake (*Regina septemvittata*)



Northern Brown (DeKay's) Snake (*Storeria dekayi dekayi*)



Northern Redbelly Snake (*Storeria occipitomaculata occipitomaculata*)



Eastern Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis sirtalis*)



Eastern Ribbon Snake (*Thamnophis sauritus sauritus*)



Eastern Smooth Earth Snake (*Virginia valeriae valeriae*)



Eastern Hognose Snake (*Heterodon platyrhinos*)



Northern Ringneck Snake (*Diadophis punctatus edwardsi*)



Southern Ringneck Snake (*Diadophis punctatus punctatus*)



Eastern Worm Snake (*Carphophis amoenus amoenus*)



Northern Black Racer (*Coluber constrictor constrictor*)



Rough Green Snake (*Opheodrys aestivus*)



Smooth Green Snake (*Opheodrys vernalis*)



Corn Snake (*Elaphe guttata guttata*) State Endangered Species



Black Rat Snake (*Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta*)



Northern Pine Snake (*Pituophis melanoleucus melanoleucus*) State Threatened Species



Eastern Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getula getula*)



Eastern Milk Snake (*Lampropeltis triangulum triangulum*)



Scarlet Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum elapsoides*)



"Coastal Plain" Milk Snake intergrade (*L. t. triangulum* x *L. t. elapsoides*)



Northern Scarlet Snake (*Cemophora coccinea copei*)



Northern Copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortix mokasen*) (VENOMOUS)



Timber Rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*) State Endangered Species—(VENOMOUS)

