Snakes and Lizards of Minnesota
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Look for the “Wild and Rare” logo in this booklet. The snakes and lizards identified with this logo are only thirteen of almost 300 wildlife species in Minnesota that are Species in Greatest Conservation Need, which means they are rare or likely to become rare in the near future. We can all help conserve these native animals and their habitats. For more information about Minnesota’s wild and rare species, and Minnesota’s State Wildlife Action Plan, visit www.mndnr.gov/wildandrare, and www.mndnr.gov/cwcs.

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Snakes and Lizards of Minnesota

Throughout time, snakes have caused fear in many people, while evoking awe in others. Either way, snakes are often misunderstood and under-appreciated. In fact, many people kill snakes simply because they fear and dislike them, and don’t understand what snakes contribute to our world. This human persecution has led to the decline of many snake species, including those found in Minnesota. Fear of snakes is a learned behavior, and is often heightened by media misrepresentation and sensationalism. As we learn more about snakes and their benefits, our willingness to coexist with them increases.

Like snakes, lizards are often unappreciated and somewhat feared by people in the upper Midwest simply because they are so unfamiliar. This lack of direct and indirect experience with lizards is understandable in Minnesota, since we only have three lizard species, and all have a very short active season.

The goal of this booklet is to provide accurate information about Minnesota’s native snakes and lizards. By learning about these animals and how to identify them, we hope to increase your appreciation and understanding of them.

General Biology
Minnesota has seventeen snake species, two of which are rattlesnakes, and three lizard species. Snakes and lizards are classified as reptiles, which are characterized by having scaly skin and being ectothermic (cold-blooded). Because the body temperature of these animals is largely controlled by the temperature of their surroundings, they are typically only active in Minnesota from April through late October. During the winter, they move underground, below the frost line, and become inactive, or hibernate.

Once snakes and lizards emerge from hibernation in spring, they generally will move away from dens or other over-wintering areas to hunting areas, where they will spend most of the active season. In fall, snakes and lizards move back to their wintering areas, or hibernacula. This “migratory” behavior is more common with Minnesota’s snakes
than lizards. May is the peak time for spring movements and September for fall movements, making them the peak months for most snake-human encounters. However, the peak encounter time for Timber Rattlesnakes in Minnesota is July through August.

In addition to seasonal active periods, snakes and lizards also have daily activity patterns. Many snakes and lizards are diurnal, being active during the day, particularly in spring and fall when temperatures are cooler. During the summer, many snakes and lizards, particularly those that live in dry, sandy or rocky habitat, become nocturnal, where they are active primarily at night, or crepuscular, where they are active primarily at dawn and dusk. This change in daily activity period allows ectothermic animals, such as snakes and lizards, to avoid overheating during the extreme temperatures of summer days.

A few key differences between snakes and lizards relate to their anatomy. Minnesota’s lizards have legs, external ear openings, and eyelids, while snakes lack all of these features. Instead of eyelids, snakes have clear scales, called spectacles, which cover and protect their eyes.

**Skin**

One common misconception about snakes and lizards is that they feel slimy. On the contrary, they have dry, scaly skin which can often feel rough. Reptile scales are made of keratin, the same material as human fingernails. Scales help snakes and lizards retain moisture, protect their bodies from wear and tear from their sometimes harsh environments, and provide colors and patterns that may allow them to blend in with their natural surroundings (cryptic coloration). Scales also help snakes move as they crawl and climb. Scales can be smooth or keeled (Figure 1), having a ridge along the centerline similar to the pointed keel of a boat. In some species, scales are modified to form different structures, such as a rattlesnake’s rattle.

![Figure 1. Scale comparison.](image)
Snakes and lizards shed their scales, or skin, as a way to allow for growth, keep their bodies free of mites and other parasites, and to replace old, worn skin. Skin can be shed in one piece, which typically occurs in snakes, or it can flake off, which is more common in lizards. Snakes shed their skin by rubbing their nose on a rock or some other rough surface to break the skin. They then crawl out of the old skin, leaving the shed skin inside out (Figure 2). Freshly shed snakeskins can be used to identify different species because you can often still see the pattern and scale composition. Young snakes and lizards shed more frequently than adults, sometimes two to three times during the active season. However, once they reach maturity, shedding typically occurs only once or twice per year. Prior to shedding, the skin appears faded and dull, especially with snakes. Because snakes shed the scale covering each eye, their eyes may appear milky as the scales loosen (Figure 3). Snakes are particularly vulnerable during this time due to their vision being impaired, and they may behave more defensively when encountered. After shedding, the animal’s skin color and patterning are bright and clear, and may even appear glossy.
The number, shape, color and patterning of scales can vary considerably between species, and often within a species. There can be differences in patterns and colors among geographic regions as well as at a more local level. Colors and patterns can also change as the animal matures. For example, hatchling North American Racers have blotched patterning, somewhat similar to a Milksnake. Once the Racers are about three years old, they will have developed typical adult coloration of solid slate gray or blue on their back, with a yellow underside.

Skin variations can make identification challenging; however, each species has a scale composition (color and/or pattern) that is typically characteristic for that species (Figure 4).

The dorsal pattern on the backs of snakes and lizards is one characteristic used for identification. These patterns can be in the form of blotches, vertical lines/stripes running from head to tail, horizontal bars/bands running across the body, or no pattern (solid). Some snakes have patterns on their belly that are used for identification. These patterns include a checker board, a series
of half moons, or solid. This booklet identifies the typical pattern characteristic for each adult species native to Minnesota, to help you with species identification, and acknowledges species that are known to have frequent color and pattern variations in Minnesota. This booklet also features snakes and lizards that have different hatchling coloration or patterning.

Figure 4. Snake skin patterns l-r: blotched (Milksnake), lined or striped (Gartersnake), banded (Timber Rattlesnake).

Another scale characteristic that is often used in snake identification is the anal plate. It is a scale that covers a snake’s vent, the opening used for excretion as well as reproduction. The anal plate is either singular or divided in snakes (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Some snakes have a divided anal plate, while others have a single anal plate. In Minnesota, the ventral scales on the tails of venomous snakes are singular, whereas non-venomous snakes have divided ventral tail scales.
In some snake species, the number of scale rows and placement of patterns or colors on these rows can be a key characteristic for identification. This can be difficult to determine and is typically used more by professional herpetologists.

**Venomous Vs. Non-venomous Snakes in Minnesota**

Many people believe that some of Minnesota’s snakes are poisonous. This is not accurate. Poison is generally ingested and intended to ward off or kill predators whereas, venom is a type of toxin that is injected into prey to help subdue and/or kill it prior to consumption. Minnesota’s rattlesnakes are considered venomous, rather than poisonous, because they deliver their venom by injection, and their flesh is not poisonous to another animal if it is eaten.

Minnesota has two venomous snakes, both of which are rattlesnakes. There are several characteristics that differentiate our rattlesnakes from our 15 non-venomous snake species. Our two rattlesnakes have segmented tails, while our non-venomous snakes have tails that taper to a point (Figure 6). Eyes also differ between the two groups. Rattlesnakes have elliptical, or cat’s eye pupils, but our non-venomous species have round pupils (Figure 7). A third difference relates to the scale pattern on the ventral tail surface. Minnesota’s rattlesnakes have single ventral scales on their tail, whereas, our non-venomous snakes have divided ventral scales on their tail (Figure 5). Both of Minnesota’s rattlesnakes are called pit vipers because they have a set

![Figure 6. Segmented Timber Rattlesnake tail (left) and pointed Gophersnake tail (right).](image-url)
of loreal or heat-sensing pits located between their eyes and nostrils (Figure 7). Non-venomous snakes in Minnesota lack these pits. Lastly, our rattlesnakes have triangular-shaped heads that are noticeably wider than their necks, while our non-venomous snakes have rounded heads that are essentially the same width as their necks.

Several of these differentiating characteristics require close views of the animal. It is not recommended that you get close enough to a snake to make these observations. If you do not recognize a snake that you encounter, be safe. Leave the snake alone, slowly back away, and if you need to pass the snake, stay at least six feet away.

Figure 7. Comparison of venomous snake’s head (Timber Rattlesnake top and above left), to a nonvenomous snake’s head (Gophersnake top right, Western Foxsnake bottom right).
Feeding
Snakes and lizards have a wide range of feeding habits. All snakes are carnivores (meat-eaters), consuming anything from insects to small mammals. Lizards, on the other hand, can be herbivores (plant-eaters) or carnivores. All of Minnesota’s lizards are carnivorous, eating primarily insects. Lizards are considered to be active foragers, and typically use their eyesight when searching for a meal. Once they locate prey, they simply grab it and eat it. In contrast, snakes use a variety of methods to locate and capture their food. A snake’s tongue (Figure 8) plays an important role in finding prey. Snakes use their tongues to collect chemical cues from their surroundings, which are then transferred to a gland in their mouth called a Jacobson’s organ. This organ then sends information to the snake’s brain to help determine if an item is food or not. Minnesota’s rattlesnakes have an additional characteristic that helps in finding prey; their loreal pits (Figure 7). These are heat-sensing pits located between their eyes and nostrils, and allow a snake to sense heat given off by warm-blooded animals such as mice.

Snakes capture their food in different ways. Some snakes are active foragers, similar to lizards, which visually search for and capture prey by grabbing and swallowing it. A snake’s inward pointing teeth allow it to hold on to live prey and move it down its throat. Some snakes use constriction to immobilize their meal before they eat it. Snakes using this method will seize the animal with their jaws and wrap their body around it to hold it as they swallow it. The pressure a snake can exert is often enough to suffocate the prey. Another capture method is one
in which venom is injected. Minnesota’s rattlesnakes use an ambush hunting style in which they lie in wait for an opportunity to grab prey and inject venom. The animal is then released and continues for a short distance before it succumbs to the rattlesnake venom. The rattlesnake uses its loreal pits to track its prey for consumption, now that the prey’s claws and teeth no longer pose a threat to the rattlesnake. The venom of Minnesota’s rattlesnake species have digestive enzymes that help break down the animal’s tissue, allowing for easier digestion.

Snakes often eat prey that is much larger than their mouths (Figure 9). They are able to swallow large items because they can move both their upper and lower jaws, allowing their mouths to open very wide. Their bodies also have the flexibility to expand when something large is swallowed. Because some meals fill a significant portion of a snake’s mouth, snakes have the ability to extend their windpipe, or glottis (Figure 10), to the edge of their mouth. This allows the snake to breathe in spite of having its mouth full.

**Breeding**

Minnesota’s snakes and lizards reproduce sexually. For lizards, courtship and mating typically occurs in spring, and includes visual displays and posturing. Male lizards in breeding condition often have bright colors that are used for attracting females, as well as for defensive or territorial displays to competing males. About 30-60
days after breeding, the female lizard lays a clutch of leathery eggs in a damp, warm spot. Minnesota’s two skink species guard their eggs, but the Six-lined Racerunner does not.

Figure 10. Plains Hog-nosed Snake’s glottis.

Juvenile lizards in Minnesota have blue tails (Figure 11) that identify them to adult males as being young, non-breeders. A male lizard will recognize their non-breeding status and allow them into his territory rather than chase them out or attack them.

Figure 11. Juvenile Six-lined Racerunner. Note blue tail.

Most Minnesota snakes breed upon emergence from hibernation in spring; however, some engage in courtship and mating in fall. Nine of Minnesota’s snake species lay eggs (oviparous), while the other eight give birth to live young in membranous sacks (ovoviviparous) (Figure 12). None of our egg-laying snakes tend their eggs. They excavate a cavity for the leathery eggs in a warm, damp place, deposit them,
cover the hole and leave the site. Similarly, none of our live-bearing snakes are known to actively tend to their young. Some females can be found with their young for up to fourteen days after birth, but it is unclear if they are guarding their young, or simply too exhausted to move away.

Defensive Behaviors

The main defensive technique used by snakes and lizards is to hide. Both use cryptic coloration (Figure 13) to blend into their surroundings, and many will spend time hidden under rocks, vegetation, or other suitable cover. If a snake or lizard is seen, it may employ a variety of defensive behaviors. Lizards, and some
snakes, are very fast, and when seen, will often dash away to cover. Sometimes a lizard will stand its ground and try to bluff a predator by inflating its body to make it appear bigger, and doing a series of quick push-ups. Many lizards have bright colors on the sides of their bodies that “flash” as they perform these quick movements, which may serve to scare away a predator. Minnesota’s three lizards also have the ability to lose a portion of their tail when threatened (Figure 14). When the tail breaks off, it continues to wiggle, distracting the predator and enabling the lizard to escape. A new tail will regenerate, but it won’t be as long as the original, and it will take a long time to re-grow. Some lizards can employ this technique multiple times.

Snakes will also use bluff tactics to scare a predator. This may include inflating their bodies and raising their heads off the ground in a strike position. A snake may or may not strike, and will sometimes make a “bluff” strike where it doesn’t open its mouth. A Western Foxsnake can inflate its head to make it appear larger and more triangular-shaped, like a Timber Rattlesnake head, and will often behave aggressively by striking repeatedly. Some snakes, such as the Gophersnake, will hiss in an attempt to scare off predators, and others, such as Eastern Gartersnakes, will use odor and bodily excretions. Both the Eastern and Plains Hog-nosed Snakes have an elaborate defensive display in which they flatten their head and posture their body to make themselves look like a Cobra (Figure 15). If agitated enough, they will then roll onto their back and play dead. If that doesn’t work, they will regurgitate food and excrete feces and a bad odor from their vent. Rattlesnakes use their rattle to
alert predators. Non-venomous snakes will often mimic a rattlesnake if threatened. These “rattlesnake mimics” will shake their tails, and while they do not possess a rattle, they can sound like the real thing! Because of this convincing defensive behavior, many of these mimics are killed annually by people mistaking them for rattlesnakes.

**Venomous Snakebites**

One of the greatest fears people have about coexisting with snakes is the potential for a rattlesnake bite. The reality is that most Minnesotans will never encounter a rattlesnake, let alone be struck at or bitten by one. Rattlesnakes are quite uncommon; in fact, the Massasauga has not been confirmed in Minnesota for over 50 years. (Many people who encounter the Northern Watersnake mistake it for a Massasauga.) The Timber Rattlesnake is only found in southeastern Minnesota’s bluff country; people are highly unlikely to encounter this snake in other parts of the state.

During a twenty-year period, from 1982-2002, 31 snake bites from Timber Rattlesnakes were reported in Minnesota. However, only five of these were considered “legitimate” bites, in which a person inadvertently encountered a rattlesnake and was bitten. The other 26 bites involved captive snakes or people who deliberately handled rattlesnakes, and most victims were under the influence of alcohol. No fatalities due to Timber Rattlesnake bites were reported during this time frame (Keyler, 2005).

Timber Rattlesnakes are generally docile. If they do not feel threatened, they often won’t even rattle during an encounter. If they do feel threatened, their first reaction is to try to hide, or flee from
the threat. If they are cornered or provoked, they will rattle and may “bluff” strike with a closed mouth. Under continued harassment, they will strike with an open mouth and may bite. Approximately 48% of Timber Rattlesnake bites to humans are “dry” or contain minimal amounts of venom. Venom is used to immobilize prey and takes a lot of energy for a snake to produce. As a result, snakes often don’t actively inject venom into a human during a bite.

In Minnesota, dogs and livestock are bitten more frequently by rattlesnakes than are people, but this is still a rare occurrence. An unleashed dog will often investigate novel items in its surroundings, such as a snake, thereby agitating the snake. About half of the Timber Rattlesnake reports in Minnesota occur after a dog has found the snake. By the time a person figures out what the dog is up to, the snake is often cornered and agitated, giving the impression that Timber Rattlesnakes are aggressive. Dogs and livestock, including horses, are typically bitten in the face. If venom is injected, it is usually not a fatal dose, but severe swelling is commonly associated with a rattlesnake bite. With a face bite, the biggest threat is suffocation due to swelling of the nasal passages. It is important to obtain medical attention for the animal, to reduce swelling and open breathing passages. Use of antivenom on dogs and livestock is an option, but is often not necessary. Most medium- to large-sized dogs and livestock survive a Timber Rattlesnake bite.

If you encounter a rattlesnake, or a snake you are unable to identify, do not try to capture or kill it. Statistics show there is a greater risk of being bitten if an attempt is made to approach and kill the snake. The maximum striking distance for a coiled rattlesnake is two thirds its body length; striking distance is less if the snake is not coiled. Therefore, if you have such an encounter, the best thing to do is slowly back away. If you must go past the snake, leave a minimum safe distance of six feet between you and the snake. If you have a dog with you, it is important to get your dog on a leash or under your control until you are well past the snake.

If a person is bitten by a Timber Rattlesnake, it is important to keep the person as calm as possible and seek medical attention as soon as possible, preferably within one hour. Although Timber Rattlesnake
bites are rarely life threatening, they should always be taken seriously. Rattlesnake bite victims may be treated with antivenom to counteract the effects the venom may have on the body. Not all medical facilities in Minnesota and surrounding states carry antivenom. More information about how to treat a rattlesnake bite, and a list of hospitals that carry the antivenom, can be found on the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) website (see Resource section on page 64).

Conservation
Snakes and lizards play a beneficial role in our environment by consuming large numbers of insects and small mammals. Considering the rapid reproductive rate of mice, voles, and many insects, and the impact they can have on agriculture and transmittal of diseases to humans, keeping these populations in check is important. Additionally, snakes and lizards are food for other animals, which also helps keep their own numbers in check. Unfortunately, many people do not appreciate the value of snakes and lizards. As a result, these animals, particularly snakes, are often killed. Human persecution of snakes is one of the largest threats to these animals, especially as people move into more rural areas. For species such as rattlesnakes, which don’t reproduce often, increased human-caused mortality severely impacts their populations. We are currently seeing these declines in Minnesota’s snake and lizard populations. Recent surveys conducted by the MNDNR for some snake and lizard species indicated they were not as abundant or widespread as they had been just 15 years ago.

People also impact snake and lizard populations in other, less direct, ways. Habitat fragmentation, degradation, and loss caused by human development and lack of management are increasing concerns for all of Minnesota’s wildlife. As homes and businesses expand, reducing habitat connectivity, snakes, lizards and other wildlife become isolated. As a result, many animals are unable to meet their basic needs (food, water, shelter, reproduction opportunities). To survive, they must spend more time looking for food and water, and finding adequate shelter and mates. This can lead to increased predation, reduced body condition, lack of reproduction, and ultimately, population declines.
A big concern associated with further human development is an increase in the number of roads and the number of vehicles travelling on them. Roads often function as travel barriers, where animals simply avoid crossing them, thus reducing habitat availability. Roads are also a source of direct mortality when animals are hit by cars. This is a concern for snakes because recent studies suggest that snakes “freeze”, rather than flee, when they sense the vibrations of approaching vehicles. During spring and fall, some snakes seek out blacktop roads for basking. These behaviors put snakes at greater risk when roads occur near or dissect their preferred habitat. These animals become easy targets for people who deliberately swerve to hit snakes seen on roads.

Aside from development, habitat degradation is also a threat. Most snakes and lizards live in a variety of habitats, though some will live in only one or two kinds. As a result, when some habitat types, such as wetlands and prairies, decline in abundance and quality, impacts are felt by the many animals that depend on these habitats. For example, Timber Rattlesnakes den on south and west facing bluffs in SE Minnesota. Due to lack of fire and grazing, these bluff prairies are being encroached by trees which shade out important habitat not only for rattlesnakes, but also other snake and lizard species. Non-native, invasive plants, are dominating many of our natural communities, decreasing their habitat quality and ability to support many wildlife species. Many of these non-native plants originate from landscape plantings around homes, farms and businesses.

**How You Can Help Minnesota’s Snakes and Lizards**
There are many simple actions that you can take to help Minnesota’s snakes and lizards. One of the easiest and most important things you can do is to allow snakes or lizards to live on your property and wherever else you see them. If you see a snake or lizard in your yard, more often than not, the snake or lizard will move on its way and you will not encounter it again. Take the opportunity to appreciate the animal, as many Minnesotans don’t get the chance to see many of our snakes and lizards. Take some pictures and try to identify what
species it is, and share your photo with family and friends. Even if you are fearful of snakes or lizards, taking time to learn about the species in your yard is an opportunity to perhaps decrease your fear, and increase your appreciation for the animal.

You can also manage your land in a snake-and-lizard-friendly manner. This includes stopping, or reducing, your use of insecticides which can bioaccumulate, or build up, in insect-eating lizards and snakes. You can help by leaving some areas of your property in a more wild state, by not mowing, or by restoring them to prairie or other native habitat. You can leave downed logs, brush piles, and rock piles, which provide shelter and food sources for many wildlife species. If you have natural areas on your property, management can be timed to reduce impacts to snakes, lizards and other wildlife. For example, prescribed fires can be conducted in March, late October or November when most reptile species are inactive. You can also keep your pets, particularly cats, indoors or on a leash when outdoors. Many snakes, lizards, birds and other wildlife are killed every year by cats and dogs. For more information on managing your land for snakes and lizards, see the Resources section on page 64 for internet links and other references.

If you want to attract over-wintering snakes, you can construct an artificial overwintering area, or hibernaculum. Instructions on how to build one can be downloaded from the internet. (See Resources section on page 64 for web link to hibernaculum design.)

Please don’t release any unwanted captive snakes or lizards, even native species, into the wild. Released animals can introduce disease to wild populations, they can out compete and displace native species, and some may be able to interbreed, putting our native populations at risk. We have already encountered exotic snakes released onto some of Minnesota’s natural areas. If you have a pet reptile or amphibian you no longer want, the Minnesota Herpetological Society has a program for placing such animals in new homes. (See the Resources section on page 64 for a web link.) You can help Minnesota’s snakes and lizards by supporting Minnesota’s Nongame Wildlife Program and donating to the Nongame Wildlife Checkoff on your Minnesota state tax form (see
inside back cover of this book for more information). You can also
buy a conservation license plate for your vehicle and/or support
other conservation efforts. Many individuals and organizations
are working together to protect and manage Minnesota’s wildlife,
including snakes and lizards. Your support is greatly appreciated!

Managing Unwanted Snakes
Even though snakes are beneficial to have around, you may not want
them in or around your home. While there is no fool-proof way to
prevent snakes from ever entering your yard or home, there are steps
you can take to discourage their presence. Snakes often seek shelter
in cool, damp places such as a basement or under a shed. They may
also look for overwintering spots that extend below the frost line,
which may be provided by a house foundation. To prevent snakes
from entering your home through the foundation, all openings ¼" or
larger should be sealed or covered. For holes that are hard to fill or
cover, you can try spray foam that will expand and fill in the smaller
nooks and crannies. Also, look for small holes around windows, doors,
water pipes, electrical lines, open septic pump drain tiles and other
spots that might have space allowing access into your home.

To discourage snakes from entering your yard, you should keep
glass mowed short, move wood piles and other debris away from
your house, and keep the area under bird feeders clean so as not to
attract rodents. Shrubbery should be trimmed up at the base and
not be planted directly against your house. Because snakes will bask
on blacktop driveways, you can keep them away from your house by
having a concrete apron by the garage. Snakes can also enter homes
through the garage if it is attached to the house. Keep your garage
door shut, and make sure there is a good seal between the garage
door and floor. Also, seal any holes in garage walls. Some snakes like
to lay eggs in compost heaps, so keep your compost area away from
the house and not in your garden.

Many people inquire about advertised snake repellents and home
remedies for discouraging snakes. Things like moth balls, sulfur,
naphthalene, tacky bird repellent, lime, cayenne pepper spray, and
creosote have been tested but are not effective in repelling snakes.
For people seriously afraid of snakes, you can put up a fence designed to keep snakes out of your yard or garden. However, some snakes are adept at climbing, so a fence is not a fool proof method. Installing a fence is expensive, but it may help in some situations such as when trying to keep rattlesnakes out of your garden. The fence should be made of ¼" galvanized hardware cloth that is at least 36" wide. The lower 4"-6" should be buried in the ground, and the above ground portion should be slanted outward at a 30-degree angle. Fence supports should be on the inside of the fence. If a gate is needed, it should fit tightly and open to the inside. Keep vegetation short on both sides of the fence. (See Resources section on page 64 for web link to fence design.)

Removing Snakes From a Building
If a snake finds its way into your home, the easiest way to try to get it out is to use a broom and sweep it out a door or into a garbage can that can be carried out. If you cannot reach the snake, you can try to trap it. To trap a snake, you should first try to reduce the size of the area in which the snake is located by closing doors, stuffing towels under doors to seal the space between doors and the floor, or enclose the area somehow, if possible. Next, take a box and cut a hole in the side, flush with the bottom, and about 1”- 2” square. Place a damp rag in it. Seal the top of the box shut and note the weight. It should feel light. Set the box near the wall. After several hours, place a piece of cardboard over the opening and turn the box on its side. If you hear or feel movement, you should have a snake inside. With the hole still covered, take the box outside and away from your home. Set the box on the ground and unseal the hole to release the snake. Make sure you seal any holes in your home’s foundation to prevent a snake from getting back in.

If you trap a snake in your house during winter, it cannot be released outside because it will die. In this situation, contact a DNR Nongame Wildlife Specialist through the DNR Information Center at 1-888-646-6367.
Redbell y Snake  
*(Storeria occipitomaculata)*

**Status:** Not listed  
**Size:** 8 – 10 inches  
**Active season:** Late April through October  
**Scales:** Keeled, divided anal plate  
**Description:** Distinctive characteristic is the bright red, salmon or orange-colored belly. The dorsal color can range from solid reddish brown to black with a light mid-dorsal stripe and two narrow darker stripes on each side.  
**Diet:** Primarily slugs, but also earthworms, beetle larva, snails  
**Habitat:** Prefer moist woodland habitats, but can be found in adjacent fields or wet areas. They overwinter below the frost line, often with other snake species, in abandoned ant mounds, rock crevices, and stone foundations.  
**Hunting:** Active forager  
**Reproduction:** Livebearer, litter size is 1 – 23 young, with average litter size of 8  
**Other name(s):** None known  
**Notes:** The Redbelly Snake looks very similar to the DeKay’s Brownsnake; however, the Brownsnake’s belly is typically much paler in color and it has small black dots along the dorsal stripe.
Redbelly Snake showing typical coloring.

Redbelly Snake showing color variation.
**DEKAY’S BROWNSNAKE**
*(Storeria dekayi)*

**Status:** Not listed  
**Size:** 8 - 15 inches  
**Active season:** Mid April through October  
**Scales:** Keeled, divided anal plate  
**Description:** Small, grayish brown snake with a light mid-dorsal stripe bordered by two parallel rows of small dark spots. The belly is pale pink or cream colored with dark pinpoint specks along the edges of the belly scales. There is typically a dark stripe behind each eye.  
**Diet:** Earthworms, slugs, soft-bodied insect larva, snails  
**Habitat:** Found under the surface litter in a variety of habitats, including moist areas of deciduous forests and woodland edges, oak savannas, prairies, old fields, and urban areas. They overwinter below the frost line, often in the company of other snake species, in deserted ant mounds, rock piles and stone foundations, and use the same site year after year.  
**Hunting:** Active forager  
**Reproduction:** Livebearer, average litter is 13-14 young, but can vary greatly  
**Other name(s):** None known  
**Notes:** The DeKay’s Brownsnake looks very similar to the Redbelly Snake; however, the Redbelly typically has a bright red or salmon colored belly, and lacks the small blacks dots on the back.
DeKay’s Brownsnake.

DeKay’s Brownsnake.
**Lined Snake**  
*(Tropidoclonion lineatum)*

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<th>Status:</th>
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<td>Size:</td>
<td>8 – 15 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active season:</td>
<td>Late April through early October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scales:</td>
<td>Keeled, single anal plate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description:</td>
<td>Drab gray brown to olive dorsal color with three whitish gray to yellow dorsal stripes. The center dorsal stripe is narrow, while the lateral dorsal stripes are wider, occupying scale rows two and three. The belly is white to pale yellow, marked with two rows of black semi-circles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diet:</td>
<td>Earthworms, almost exclusively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitat:</td>
<td>Prefers prairies, savannas, and woodland edges, hiding under cover. They overwinter below the frost line in self-excavated burrows, rock crevices and mammal burrows. This species has a limited range in Minnesota, occurring only in the southwestern part of the state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting:</td>
<td>Active forager, uses scent, but sight may also play a role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproduction:</td>
<td>Livebearer, litter size is 2 – 17 young, with average litter size of 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other name(s):</td>
<td>None known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes:</td>
<td>Lined Snakes look similar to Gartersnakes; however, Gartersnakes lack the double row of spots on the belly. Lined Snakes are typically nocturnal and semi-fossorial (living underground), but can be found sunning in the open during the spring and fall.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lined Snake.

Belly photo of Lined Snake showing black, semi-circle pattern.
Ring-necked Snake
(Diadophis punctatus)

Status: Not listed
Size: 10 – 15 inches
Active season: April through October
Scales: Unkeeled, divided anal plate
Description: Solid shiny bluish black to gray on its back, with a bright yellow-orange ring around its neck. Belly is yellow to orange, often with bright red on the underside of its tail. Black spots are scattered across the snake's belly. Ring-necked snakes in northern MN have few to no black spots on the belly.
Diet: Insects, earthworms, slugs, small salamanders, frogs and other snakes
Habitat: Often found on south to west-facing hillsides and bluffs in southeastern MN, and under rocks, logs, or bark in damp deciduous forests in northern MN. These snakes are quite secretive, spending much of their time under flat rocks and in crevices. They prefer areas with abundant ground cover. They overwinter in rock crevices or animal burrows that go below the frost line.
Hunting: Active forager at night, uses scent
Reproduction: Egg layer, clutch size is 1 – 10 eggs, with an average of 5
Other name(s): Corkscrew Snake. This nickname was earned because of one of the snake's defensive behaviors; it rolls its tail into a tight coil to show its bright underside in a flashy display.
Notes: Minnesota has two subspecies of Ring-necked Snakes. The Prairie Ring-necked (Diadophis punctatus arnyi) occurs in southeastern MN, whereas the Northern Ring-necked (D. p. edwardsii) is found in Pine County and north.
RING-NECKED SNAKE

Ring-necked Snake.

Ring-necked Snake demonstrating its defensive “corkscrew” behavior.

Ring-necked Snake.
SMOOTH GREENSNAKE
(Opheodrys vernalis)

Status: Not listed, Species in Greatest Conservation Need
Size: 14 – 20 inches
Active season: Mid April through September
Scales: Unkeeled, divided anal plate
Description: Bright green, solid dorsal color with a white or pale yellow belly. Some light brown specimens have been found. This snake is very slender. Hatchlings are solid olive green.
Diet: Grubs, worms, insects – especially caterpillars, spiders, and grasshoppers
Habitat: Found in prairies, meadows, savannas, and woodland and marsh edges. They overwinter below the frost line, often with other snake species in ant mounds and other structures.
Hunting: Active forager
Reproduction: Egg layer, clutch size is 2 – 18 eggs, with an average of 7
Other name(s): Grass Snake
Notes: This snake loses its bright green coloration upon death, often fading to pale blue. As a result, it may be mistaken for a North American Racer (Coluber constrictor). However, Racers of this size are juveniles and have a blotched pattern rather than a solid color.
Color variation in two Smooth Greensnakes.

Cryptic coloration in a Smooth Greensnake.
NON-VENOMOUS SNAKES

PLAINS HOG-NOSED SNAKE
(Heterodon nasicus)

Status: Special Concern, Species in Greatest Conservation Need
Size: 15 - 25 inches
Active season: Early May through September
Scales: Keeled, divided anal plate
Description: Medium-sized, stout bodied snake with a sharply pointed and upturned nose. This snake is tan to gray, with dark brown blotches running mid-dorsally. Two rows of smaller blotches can occur on each side. Two dark spots occur on the neck, and resemble “eyespots” when the snake flattens its head. The head has a dark bar between the eyes, and from each eye to the corner of the mouth. The belly is black with cream or yellow edging. The underside of the tail is black.
Diet: Toads, frogs, salamanders, lizards, shrews and mice
Habitat: Prefer open sandy or gravelly areas in river floodplains and sand prairies. They overwinter below the frost line in mammal or self-dug burrows.
Hunting: Active forager
Reproduction: Egg layer, clutch size is 2 - 24 eggs, with an average of 11
Other name(s): Western Hog-nose, Blow Snake, Puff Adder, Cobra
Notes: If threatened, this snake will flatten its head and raise it like a Cobra, hissing and striking repeatedly. It will also “play dead” by rolling on its back, regurgitating food, and excreting feces. The Plains Hog-nosed is often confused with the Eastern Hog-nosed; however, the Plains has a more upturned nose and the underside of the tail is black.
Adult Plains Hog-nosed Snake.

Plains Hog-nosed Snake. Note underside of tail below vent is black.

Juvenile Plains Hog-nosed Snake. Juveniles of this species have different coloration than adults.
COMMON GARTERSNAKE
(Thamnophis sirtalis)

Status: Not listed
Size: 16 – 26 inches
Active season: Early April through November
Scales: Keeled, single anal plate
Description: Slender black or dark snake with three dorsal yellowish stripes. The lateral dorsal stripes occur only on the second and third scale rows. The belly is pale yellow, but may also be pale blue or green. Darks spots may be present on the outer edges of the belly scales. The light yellow or pale green upper lip is typically unmarked.
Diet: Frogs, toads, salamanders, earthworms, insects and fish
Habitat: This species is a habitat generalist, occurring in most Minnesota habitats. It prefers forest and woodland edges, and has a strong affiliation for water and wet areas. They overwinter below the frost line in open canopy wetlands, mammal burrows, building foundations, cisterns, rock crevices and quarries. Gartersnakes den communally in very large numbers.
Hunting: Active forager
Reproduction: Livebearer, average litter is 27 young, but can vary greatly
Other name(s): Grass Snake, Garden Snake
Notes: Most commonly encountered snake in Minnesota. Females are slightly longer and much heavier than males. Minnesota has two subspecies of Gartersnakes, the Red-sided Gartersnake (T.s. parietalis) and the Eastern Gartersnake (T.s. sirtalis).
Common Gartersnake.

Red-sided Gartersnake.
KEY TO MINNESOTA’S SNAKES

Original key concept and design by John Moriarty, adapted for this publication by MNDNR-Tom Klein.
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PLAINS GARTERSNAKE
(Thamnophis radix)

Status: Not listed
Size: 16 – 28 inches
Active season: Mid April through November
Scales: Keeled, single anal plate
Description: Medium-sized, striped snake with a dark brown to black dorsal color and three light-colored dorsal stripes. The mid-dorsal stripe is typically bright yellow, while the lateral stripes are pale yellow often with a greenish or bluish tint to them. These lateral stripes occur on the third and forth scale rows. Two rows of alternating dark spots above the lateral stripes and one below can be seen if the snake’s background color is not too dark. The greenish upper lip is marked with bold, black vertical bars. The belly is pale yellow to pale green or gray with black spots on the outer edge of the belly scales.

Diet: Frogs, toads, tadpoles, earthworms, insects and fish

Habitat: Prefer moist open grasslands and prairies, savannas, and open areas around ponds, marshes and streams in grassland areas. They overwinter below the frost line, often with other snake species, in mammal burrows, deserted ant mounds, building foundations, and old wells.

Hunting: Active forager
Reproduction: Livebearer, average litter size is 10 - 20 young, but can vary greatly
Other name(s): Grass Snake, Garden Snake
Notes: The Plains Gartersnake looks very similar to the Common Garter and Lined Snakes. The Common Gartersnake does not have any markings on its lip and the Lined Snake has a double row of half-moon spots on its belly.
Plains Gartersnake’s upper lip is marked with bold, vertical black bars.
**EASTERN HOG-NOSED SNAKE**
*(Heterodon platirhinos)*

**Status:** Not listed, Species in Greatest Conservation Need

**Size:** 20 - 33 inches

**Active season:** Late April through October

**Scales:** Keeled, divided anal plate

**Description:** Medium-sized, stout-bodied snake with a sharply pointed and slightly upturned nose. Dorsal coloration can range from yellow brown to gray to olive, with dark brown blotches. Some adults have been observed with minimal to no dorsal pattern. Two dark spots occur on the neck, and resemble “eyespots” when the snake flattens its head. The belly is mottled yellow to mottled gray. In hatchlings, the ventral surface may be black, but the undersides of the neck and tail are yellow or white.

**Diet:** Primarily toads, other amphibians, arthropods

**Habitat:** Prefer sandy areas in river floodplains, sand prairies, savannas and open woodlands. Spend most of their time underground in self-excavated burrows. They overwinter below the frost line in mammal or self-dug burrows.

**Hunting:** Active forager

**Reproduction:** Egg layer, clutch size is 4 - 63 eggs, with an average of 23

**Other name(s):** Blow Snake, Puff Adder, Cobra

**Notes:** If threatened, this snake will flatten its head and raise it like a Cobra, hissing and striking repeatedly. It will also “play dead” by rolling on its back, regurgitating food, and excreting feces. The Eastern Hog-nosed is often confused with the Plains Hog-nosed; however, the Eastern has a less upturned nose and the underside of the tail is yellow.
Eastern Hog-nosed Snake playing dead. Note tail section below vent is not black, like the Plains Hog-nosed Snake.

Adult Eastern Hog-nosed Snake. Note dark “eye spots” on neck.

Adult Eastern Hog-nosed Snake (solid pattern variation).
MILKSNAKE  
(Lampropeltis triangulum)

Status: Not listed, Species in Greatest Conservation Need
Size: 24 - 36 inches
Active season: Mid April through October
Scales: Unkeeled, single anal plate
Description: Medium-sized snake with a gray or light brown background color and reddish brown to brown blotches outlined in black along the back. The main row of larger blotches is bordered with smaller blotches along the sides of the snake. A light “Y” or “V” shaped marking often occurs on the back of the neck. The belly has a distinctive black and white or yellow checkerboard pattern. Hatchlings often have bright red dorsal blotches.
Diet: Primarily rodents, but also lizards, eggs, and other snakes
Habitat: Found in deciduous forests in association with rocky areas. They are also found in woodlots, savannas, pastures and prairies. They are often found near farm buildings and homes with stone foundations. They overwinter below the frost line in rock crevices, mammal burrows, cisterns, and stone foundations.
Hunting: Constrictor, primarily nocturnal
Reproduction: Egg layer, clutch size is 1 - 24 eggs, with an average of 9.
Other name(s): None known
Notes: This snake is frequently encountered in people’s homes, especially homes with stone foundations, and around barns.
Juvenile Milksnake. Juveniles of this species have different coloration than adults.
Northern Watersnake

(Nerodia sipedon)

Status: Not listed
Size: 24 - 42 inches
Active season: Late April through early October
Scales: Keeled, divided anal plate
Description: This heavy-bodied, aquatic snake has a base color of reddish brown to gray or tan, and is marked with dark blotches (may appear like bands around the snake. These blotches can be faded in older snakes, making the snake appear solid brown or black in color. The belly is cream or white with distinct irregularly spaced, reddish half-moons and gray speckling. Juveniles are similar to adults except their blotches are more pronounced in color.

Diet: Fish, amphibians, crayfish, and insects
Habitat: Occurs in or around water including ponds, lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands. Much time is spent basking on shore or on branches overhanging water. They overwinter below the frost line in upland rock crevices and holes away from water, but crayfish burrows, muskrat and beaver dams, and levees may also be used.

Hunting: Active forager
Reproduction: Livebearer, litter size is 6 - 99 young, with an average of 27.
Other name(s): None known
Notes: This is Minnesota’s only water snake. This species is quick to defend itself if cornered. Water Moccasins (Cottonmouths) and Copperheads do not occur in Minnesota.
Northern Watersnake.
NORTH AMERICAN RACER
(Coluber constrictor)

Status: Special Concern, Species in Greatest Conservation Need
Size: 36 - 60 inches
Active season: Late April through October
Scales: Unkeeled, divided anal plate
Description: This snake is sleek and slender, designed for rapid movement. Adults vary in color from a solid slate blue to gray or greenish. The throat is yellow and grades into a light gray to whitish belly. Young Racers have dark dorsal blotches on the back and reddish brown spots on an otherwise white belly. Adult coloration is attained in about three years.
Diet: Rodents, birds, lizards, and insects
Habitat: Found in dry prairies, savannas, and woodland edges. They overwinter below the frost line in mammal burrows and rock crevices, often in the company of other snake species, and return to the same overwintering sites year after year.
Hunting: Active forager
Reproduction: Egg layer, clutch size is 1 - 36 eggs, average of 14
Other name(s): Yellow-bellied Racer, Blue Racer, Eastern Racer
Notes: This snake is one of the fastest in North America, having been clocked at a speed of 4 miles per hour.
Juvenile North American Racer. Juveniles of this species have different coloration and pattern than adults.
WESTERN FOXSNAKE
(Pantherophis vulpinus)

Status: Not listed, Species in Greatest Conservation Need
Size: 36 - 54 inches
Active season: Late April through October
Scales: Weakly keeled, divided anal plate
Description: This snake has a yellowish tan to gray background color with brown to black mid-dorsal blotches and a row of alternating smaller blotches along each side. Blotches are outlined in black. The head is a solid copper or brown color. The belly is pale yellow with brown or black markings. Young Foxsnakes typically have a lighter background color, and a dark bar between their eyes, extending to the corner of the mouth on each side.

Diet: Rodents, ground-nesting birds and their eggs
Habitat: Often found in riparian (river) areas, upland hardwood forests, pine barrens and prairies; typically near a river or stream. They overwinter below the frost line in rock crevices, mammal burrows, wells and stone foundations.
Hunting: Constrictor
Reproduction: Egg layer, clutch size is 7 – 29 eggs, with an average of 14.
Other name(s): Pine Snake, Copperhead
Notes: This snake is frequently encountered in people’s homes, especially homes with stone foundations. The previous scientific name for this snake was Elaphe vulpina.
Juvenile Western Foxsnake. Juveniles of this species have different coloration than adults.
**GopherSnake**  
*Pituophis catenifer*

**Status:** Special Concern, Species in Greatest Conservation Need  
**Size:** 37 - 72 inches  
**Active season:** Late April through early October  
**Scales:** Keeled, single anal plate  
**Description:** This snake is large and stout-bodied. Its head is heavily marked with black or near black markings, including a dark stripe from the eye to the corner of the mouth. The lips have distinct vertical black or near black bars. This snake’s coloration is unusual in that it looks like three distinct patterns. The tail is typically yellow or golden brown with dark rings, and the snake’s midsection contains black to reddish brown blotches. Coloration becomes more mottled with black and white as you move towards the head, where the blotch pattern becomes less distinct. The belly is pale yellow with square or rectangular dark spots.

**Diet:** Primarily rodents, but also birds, bird eggs, frogs  
**Habitat:** Occur in sand prairies, bluff prairies, oak savannas, oak barrens, and pastures. They overwinter below the frost line in small mammal burrows or rock crevices, often with other snake species.

**Hunting:** Constrictor, primarily diurnal in spring and fall, nocturnal in summer  
**Reproduction:** Egg layer, clutch size is 2 - 24 eggs, with an average of 11.

**Other name(s):** Bullsnake  
**Notes:** This snake has a special piece of cartilage in front of its windpipe that allows it to make a hissing sound.
Adult Gophersnake.

Juvenile Gophersnake. Juveniles of this species have slightly different coloration than adults.
RAT SNAKE
(Pantherophis obsoletus)

Status: Special Concern, Species in Greatest Conservation Need
Size: 42 - 72 inches
Active season: Late April through early October
Scales: Weakly keeled, divided anal plate
Description: A large snake with dark brown to black dorsal coloration that may be flecked with white, yellow or orange between the scales. Mid-dorsal blotches may occur, but are often indiscernible. The most distinctive feature of this snake is its bright white chin and throat. The belly is dark gray to brown with red and yellow flecks. Young Ratsnakes are heavily patterned with dark blotches on a gray background.
Diet: Rodents, birds, eggs
Habitat: Occurs primarily in oak forests, but can occasionally be found on bluff prairies. They overwinter in deep, rock crevices below frost line.
Hunting: Constrictor, typically diurnal but may be nocturnal during hot weather
Reproduction: Egg layer, clutch size is 4 - 44 eggs, with an average of 15.
Other name(s): Pilot Blacksnake, Black Ratsnake
Notes: This snake is primarily arboreal (tree dwelling). The previous scientific name for this snake was Elaphe obsoleta.
Juvenile Ratsnake. Juveniles of this species have different coloration and pattern than adults.
VENOMOUS SNAKES

MASSASAUGA
(Sistrurus catenatus)

Status: Endangered, possibly extirpated, Species in Greatest Conservation Need
Size: 18 - 30 inches
Active season: Late April through early October
Scales: Keeled, single anal plate
Description: This medium-sized rattlesnake has a gray to brown background color with large mid-dorsal brown to black blotches, which are often outlined in a light color. There is a dark stripe running from the eye to the neck, and heat-sensing pits between the eyes and nostrils. Its tail is ringed with thick, dark bands, and gives way to a segmented rattle. The belly is dark with light mottling.
Diet: Rodents, small snakes
Habitat: Prefers moist habitats such as marshes and other wetlands, backwater areas, and bottomland forests; often forages in more open, upland areas adjacent to water bodies. They overwinter below the frost line in crayfish burrows, mammal burrows, old tree stumps, or rock crevices.
Hunting: Ambush hunter, uses venom. Primarily diurnal in spring and fall, often nocturnal in summer. Young snakes wave their tail tip over their heads to attract prey items, such as frogs.
Reproduction: Livebearer, litter size is 2 - 20 young, with an average of 8.
Other name(s): Swamp Rattler
Notes: This species has not been documented in the state since before 1960. Sightings have been reported, but none have been confirmed as being a Massasauga.
Massasauga.
VENOMOUS SNAKES

TIMBER RATTLESNAKE
(Crotalus horridus)

Status: Threatened, Species in Greatest Conservation Need
Size: 36 - 54 inches
Active season: Late April through early October
Scales: Strongly keeled, single anal plate
Description: This heavy-bodied snake has a distinctly triangular, unmarked head that is solid rust to brown in color. The body color is rust-orange, to yellow, brown or gray, and has dark brown to black chevrons (bands) along its back. Minnesota snakes typically have an auburn mid-dorsal stripe. The velvet-black tail ends in a cream-colored, segmented rattle.
Diet: Rodents
Habitat: Prefers south to west facing bluff prairies and associated oak forests. They overwinter in rock crevices that reach below the frost line, often in the company of other snakes species. Timber Rattlesnakes use the same places to hibernate year after year.
Hunting: Ambush hunter, uses venom. Primarily diurnal in spring and fall, often nocturnal in summer.
Reproduction: Livebearer, litter size is 1 - 20 young, with an average of 10.
Other name(s): Banded Rattler, Velvet Tail
Female Timber Rattlesnake, with neonates (newborns) in the background. Neonates and first-year juveniles are gray, rather than brown like the adults.
Original key concept and design by John Moriarty, adapted for this publication by MNDNR-Tom Klein.

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<th>Species</th>
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<tr>
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Can you identify these lizards?
Use the KEY TO MINNESOTA’S LIZARDS.

Answers found on page 65.
**SIX-LINED RACERUNNER**  
*Aspidoscelis sexlineata*

**Status:** Not listed, Species in Greatest Conservation Need  
**Size:** Up to 9 inches in total length, snout to vent length 2 1/3 to 3 7/8 inches  
**Active season:** Mid-May to late August  
**Description:** This lizard has a slender body with a long tail. It is marked with six light yellow to yellow-green dorsal stripes from behind the eye to the base of the tail. Its body is brown or dark brown, and bright green or yellow-green on the sides.  
**Dorsal Scales:** Rough and dull  
**Diet:** Grasshoppers, crickets, beetles, ants, flies, spiders and other arthropods  
**Habitat:** Open sandy or gravelly areas with little ground vegetation, prairies on south facing bluffs and sand outwashes in river flood plains. They overwinter below the frost line in underground burrows, ordinarily self-excavated in loose soil.  
**Hunting:** Active forager  
**Reproduction:** Egg layer, clutch size is 1-6 eggs  
**Notes:** Racerunners’ tail can break off if grabbed by a predator. Juvenile Six-lined Racerunners have a powdery blue-green tail. The previous scientific name for this lizard was *Cnemidophorus sexlineatus*. 
Six-lined Racerunner.
COMMON FIVE-LINED SKINK
(Plestiodon fasciatus)

Status: Special Concern, Species in Greatest Conservation Need
Size: 5 to 8 inches in total length, snout to vent length maximum of $3\frac{3}{8}$ inches
Active season: Early May to September
Description: A small lizard with a long tail and small legs. Its back is marked with five distinct yellow stripes. These stripes form a “Y” on top of the head. The body in juveniles and females is shiny black, while males are brown to gray with less distinct, or no, stripes. During mating season, the male’s nose, cheeks, lips and throat turn bright orange-red.
Dorsal Scales: Smooth, shiny and large
Diet: Roaches and spiders, along with crickets, beetles, moths, snails and other small invertebrates
Habitat: South-facing, rocky outcrops, old woodlots, along moist forest edges, and openings in pine barrens, oak savannas and dry northern hardwood forests. They overwinter below the frost line in rock fissures and cracks below the frost line.
Hunting: Active forager
Reproduction: Egg layer, clutch size is 5-13 eggs, with an average of 9
Notes: Common Five-lined Skinks easily lose their tail to predators, with the detached tail continuing to wiggle, to distract the predator. The tail does re-grow over time, but it is not as long or colorful as the original. Juvenile Common Five-lined Skinks have a bright blue tail. The previous scientific name for this lizard was Eumeces fasciatus.
Juvenile Common Five-lined Skink. Note the blue tail.

Adult Common Five-lined Skink.
LIZARDS

PRAIRIE SKINK
(Plestiodon septentrionalis)

Status: Not listed
Size: 5\(\frac{1}{4}\) to 8\(\frac{3}{4}\) inches in total length, snout to vent length maximum of 3\(\frac{1}{2}\) inches
Active season: Early May through September
Description: This medium-sized lizard has a long tail and small legs. It is marked with three wide tan to light brown stripes, separated by two narrow black stripes along the length of the back. The dorsal stripe fades and does not extend to the top of the head. The tail color is basically the same as the body. During mating season, the males head, neck and lips turn bright orange.
Dorsal Scales: Smooth, shiny and large
Diet: Crickets, grasshoppers, beetles, caterpillars, spiders and other small arthropods.
Habitat: Often found along stream banks or openings in pine barrens, oak savannas and grasslands. They overwinter in self-constructed burrows below the frost line.
Hunting: Active forager
Reproduction: Egg layer, clutch size is 5-13 eggs, with an average of 9
Notes: Prairie Skinks easily lose their tail to predators, with the detached tail continuing to wiggle, to distract the predator. The tail does re-grow, but it is not as long or colorful as the original. Juvenile Prairie Skinks are black with seven thin, yellowish stripes and a bright blue tail. Prairie Skinks are the most commonly encountered lizard in Minnesota, except for on bluffs in SE Minnesota, where the Six-lined Racerunner is more commonly encountered. The previous scientific name for this lizard was *Eumeces septentrionalis*. 
Male Prairie Skink with bright orange coloration shown during mating season.
Resources
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources:
www.mndnr.gov

Minnesota DNR Rare Species Guide:
www.mndnr.gov/rsg/index.html

Snake hibernaculum online plans:
www.torontozoo.com/AdoptAPond/snakehibernacula.asp

Snake-proof fence design:

Habitat management guidelines for Midwestern amphibians and reptiles:
http://www.parcplace.org/publications_resources.html
www.mndnr.gov

Minnesota Herpetological Society:
www.bellmuseum.org/herpetology/

If you would like more information on the snakes and lizards of Minnesota, please refer to the book, Amphibians and Reptiles Native to Minnesota by Oldfield and Moriarty. A revision of this book is in progress.
Literature Referenced

Christoffel, R., R. Hay, and L. Ramirez. Snakes of Wisconsin. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Bureau of Endangered Resources. PUB-ER-100 00


Answers from page 57:
Top photo, left to right: juvenile Common Five-lined Skink, adult Common Five-lined Skink, and color variation of adult Common Five-lined Skink.
Bottom photo: Six-lined Racerunner.
Glossary

Arthropods – insects, spiders

Barrens (Oak, Pine) – native plant community characterized by droughty soils that typically occur on nearly level to slightly undulating sandy glacial outwash

Bioaccumulate – the accumulation of a substance, such as a pesticide, in the tissue of a living organism

Crepuscular – active primarily at dawn and dusk

Cryptic coloration – color or pattern of an animal that allows it to blend into its surroundings

Diurnal – active primarily during the day

Dorsal – upper side or top of body

Ectothermic – regulate body temperature by exchanging heat with surroundings (cold-blooded)

Endangered – species is threatened with extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range within Minnesota

Extirpated – the eradication of a species from a portion of its natural range

Habitat generalist – an animal with the ability to thrive in a wide variety of environments

Hibernaculum – overwintering area

Keeled – narrow ridge found on the scales of some snakes and lizards

Lateral – sides of body

Loreal pit – deep depression on either side of the head, between eye and nostril, which is used for sensing heat
**Mid-dorsal**—running down the center of the back

**Nocturnal**—active primarily at night

**Oak Savanna**—native plant community with a diversity of grasses and flowering plants, along with scattered “open-grown” oaks

**Rattlesnake mimic**—a non-venomous snake that imitates a rattlesnake by rapidly shaking its tail, in vegetation or against an object, to produce a “rattle” sound similar to that of a rattlesnake

**Riparian**—associated with the bank of a river, lake or stream

**Semi-fossorial**—spending part of life underground

**Special Concern**—a species that is extremely uncommon in Minnesota, or has unique or highly specific habitat requirements and deserves careful monitoring of its status. (Species on the periphery of their range may be included in this category along with those species that were once threatened or endangered but now have increasing or stable populations.)

**Species in Greatest Conservation Need**—species whose populations are rare, declining in Minnesota or elsewhere, or are vulnerable because of habitat changes and habitat needs, and human or environmental threats

**Threatened**—species is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range within Minnesota

**Unkeeled**—lack of narrow ridge found on the scales of some snakes and lizards

**Ventral**—lower side or belly of body
Notes/Observations/Sightings
Help Minnesota's Wildlife!

Look for the Loon on Your Minnesota Income Tax and Property Tax Forms! The loon marks where you can personally help preserve Minnesota's snakes and lizards, along with Bald Eagles, bluebirds, Trumpeter Swans, and other wildlife.

You can make a tax deductible donation to the “Nongame Wildlife Checkoff” on your tax form. That donation helps restore wildlife species and protect their habitats.

You can learn more about the Nongame Wildlife Program at the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources’ Web site at www.mndnr.gov/nongame. For more information about how you can also donate to the Nongame Wildlife Program online or as part of your estate planning process, contact the DNR at 1-888-646-6367.
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