

### Rough Green Snake and Smooth Green Snake

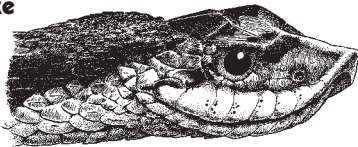
Both species are green above with white, yellow or pale green bellies. The rough green snake has keeled scales that give it a rough texture. This snake, listed as a species of special concern in Indiana, spends most of its time in trees, feeding on crickets, grasshoppers, butterfly/moth larvae and spiders.



The smooth green snake has smooth scales. It rarely climbs and is generally smaller than the rough green snake. It is only found in three small areas of the state. It is listed as endangered.

### Eastern Hognose Snake

This snake of open, sandy areas is recognized by its up-turned nose, wide head and thick body. It may be solid black, gray, yellow-green or orange with dark blotches and spots on its back and sides.



Often called the puff adder, spreading adder or blow viper, this non-venomous snake will flatten its head and neck like a cobra's hood, inflate its body and make a striking motion if threatened. It may roll over on its back and play dead with its mouth open and its tongue hanging out. It will remain that way, limp and lifeless, even if picked up. It feeds almost exclusively on toads.

### Southern Black Racer and Blue Racer

Racers feast on a diet of large insects, frogs, lizards, snakes, small rodents and birds. Both species typically have white on the chin and throat. The black racer is slender and satiny black above and satiny gray below with a brown or dark amber iris of the eye. The blue racer may show varying shades of gunmetal gray or blue above and below with a darker head and eye area. Racers move fast and sometimes appear to "chase" people. In fact, this behavior is often associated with courtship and may be used to drive an intruder out of a territory.

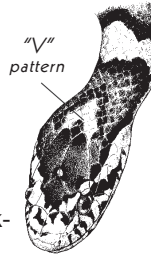


### Eastern Milk Snake and Red Milk Snake

This snake's taste for mice makes it a common visitor in barns. Hence, the myth developed that it drinks cow's milk.



It is so well camouflaged by its pattern of black-rimmed rusty-red blotches on a background of light gray that it is often missed. A light "Y" or "V" on the back of the neck may be present. The belly is an irregular checkerboard of black on white. At night, it hunts small rodents and lizards, constricting them in its coils to suffocate them before swallowing them. This harmless snake is often mistaken for the rustier red, elliptical-eyed, wider-headed Northern copperhead. The red milk snake is larger, brighter red and has a white or yellow "collar."



### Black Rat Snake

This snake, often referred to as "pilot black snake" or "chicken snake", is a good climber. Its shed skins are often found in attics and forks of trees. This constrictor feeds on mice and bird eggs and is usually a welcome resident in farmers' barns and outbuildings. Although black rat snakes can and will bite when cornered, they are not usually aggressive. Black rat snakes resemble black racers but are loaf-shaped instead of round. The belly is usually white or a black-and-white checkerboard pattern. The area between scales is light-colored. A pattern of blotches on the back is common.



### Fox Snake

This snake of marshes and wet places has bold blotches, a grayish or brownish-yellow body and a dull orange/reddish head and tail. It vibrates its tail if cornered, but rarely bites. Because of its appearance and behavior it can be easily misidentified as a venomous Massasauga rattlesnake.



### Black Kingsnake

This glossy black snake has speckles of white and cream that may be less apparent in older snakes. It lives on streambanks and in moist meadows, where it feeds on other snakes, turtle eggs, mice and voles. It is generally secretive and can be found under



boards, logs and debris. This snake's reputation for killing and devouring venomous snakes is well known.

### What If I Get Bitten?

Avoid bites by watching snakes in their natural habitat instead of picking them up. Look closely before stepping when hiking trails or fishing along lake edges. If bitten:

- Keep calm. Most snakes are not venomous. Make note of the markings, color, behavior and habitat of the snake.
- Clean the bite area thoroughly with soap and water as soon as possible.
- If you think the snake was venomous, or if you are unsure, call or have a friend call 911 and contact property staff. Walk—don't run—when moving, and keep the bitten part of your body higher than your heart to help reduce swelling.

### Protection for Indiana's Snakes

Indiana's snakes, turtles, lizards, salamanders, toads frogs and their eggs are protected by a law that prevents collection of any nongame reptiles or amphibians without a valid fishing or hunting license. Even with a valid license, collecting is restricted to four individuals from a defined list of species. Collecting is not permitted on state park properties, even with a valid license. Protect Indiana's reptiles and amphibians—leave turtles, snakes, lizards, salamanders toads and frogs in their native habitats where they can remain healthy and wild.

For more information about these laws, contact the DNR Division of Fish & Wildlife.

For more information and color pictures to aid in snake identification, get a copy of Sherman Minton's *Amphibians & Reptiles of Indiana* (ISBN 1-883362-10-5) or go online to:

[www.hoosierherpsoc.org/IDsnake.html](http://www.hoosierherpsoc.org/IDsnake.html)

or

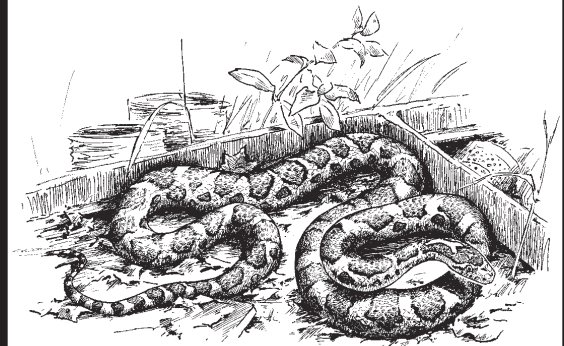
[www.INherpatlas.org](http://www.INherpatlas.org)

*The mission of the Interpretive Services is to provide information and offer interpretive experiences with Indiana's natural and cultural resources to visitors, staff and a diverse public.*

*Reptile artwork by Amelia Hansen*

9/2017

# COMMON Snakes of INDIANA STATE PARKS



Eastern Milk Snake



Memories made naturally.

Indiana Department of Natural Resources  
**Division of State Parks**  
[interpretiveservices.IN.gov](http://interpretiveservices.IN.gov)

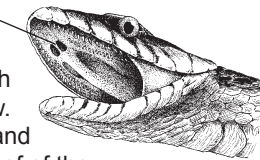
**It's a Snake!**

You turn over a rock in the creek, looking for fossils, and suddenly—it's a snake! You may see snakes in our campgrounds, sunning on logs, swimming in our lakes and marshes, and even dangling on the end of a fishing line. Are they venomous? Will they bite? This brochure answers your questions about our common snakes. Not all Indiana snakes are listed here, and not all snakes listed here are found on every state park property. Habitat, climate and people affect where snakes can be found. Species ranges are shaded on accompanying maps.

**Cool Stuff!**

1. Snakes don't have ears. They feel vibrations through the bones in their lower jaw.
2. Snakes use their tongues and a special structure in the roof of the mouth called the Jacobson's organ to "taste" what is around them.
3. Most snakes have 6 rows of teeth: 2 on top, 2 on bottom and 2 in the roof of the mouth.
4. There are 2,100 species worldwide, 115 species in North America and more than 30 species in Indiana.

Jacobson's Organ



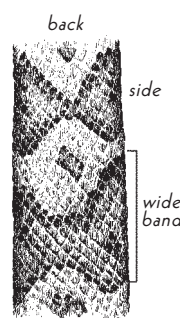
**Setting the Record Straight About Indiana's Venomous Snakes**

Only four Indiana snakes are venomous. All are pit vipers, which means they have heat-sensing pits near the eyes to help them locate their warm-blooded prey.

**Northern Copperhead**

The Northern copperhead is Indiana's most common venomous snake. Its coloring includes a coppery-orange, tan or brown head and an hour-glass pattern of reddish brown bands on its body. It is sometimes confused with the midland water snake.

Copperhead banding pattern



The bands of the copperhead are narrow along the back and wide on either side. Banding on the water snake is saddlelike; wide on the back and narrow on the side.

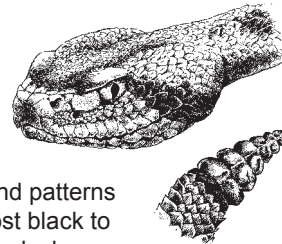
This nocturnal reptile lives in dry, rocky areas, but can be found in

old outbuildings and barns. Its venom kills prey and breaks down tissues for digestion. Young copperheads eat a lot of caterpillars. Adults feed mostly on amphibians and mammals. The bite reflex remains active up to an hour or more after a Northern copperhead's death. The bite of this snake is extremely painful but rarely life threatening.



**Timber Rattlesnake**

The timber rattlesnake is endangered in Indiana. Indiana's largest venomous snake lives on dry forested hillsides and hibernates in



dens. Colors and patterns vary from almost black to yellow with a dark chevron pattern. The distinctive head shape and rattle at the end of the tail are characteristic. A new rattle segment is added when the snake sheds its skin a few times a year.



**Massasauga Rattlesnake**

The massasauga is a small endangered pit viper found only in northern Indiana in marshy, swampy areas and bogs. It may be found in woodlands and old fields on occasion. It is spotted with dark black or brown blotches on the back and 3 rows of small, dark spots on either side. This "swamp rattler," which feeds on frogs and small mammals, is generally mild mannered and rarely strikes unless stepped on.



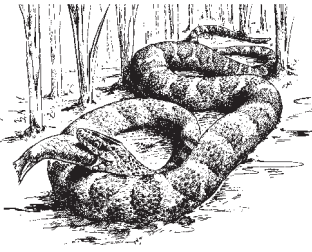
**It's a Water Moccasin! I know it is!**

Well, probably not—not in Indiana. The "cottonmouth" is a distinctly Southern species. One small population was known in the south-central portion of the state. It is most likely extirpated from the state. The water moccasin is recognized by the distinctive white mouth lining that it displays when annoyed. The color patterns of juvenile individuals are easily confused with those of the Northern or midland water snake.

**Northern Water Snake and Midland Water Snake**

This common reptile of streams, ponds and lakes suns itself on rocky banks and fallen branches. It

grabs unsuspecting frogs, salamanders, tadpoles or fish with its teeth and swallows them whole. This nonvenomous snake is often mistaken for a Northern



**Queen Snake**

This harmless snake has a dull olive-brown body with three light dorso/lateral stripes and a yellow belly with 4 distinct brown stripes running the length of its body. It feeds almost entirely on soft-bodied crayfish that have shed their shells. Its picky eating habits make it difficult to keep in captivity.



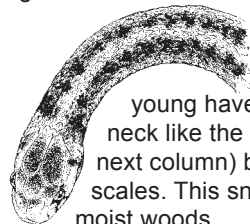
**Kirtland's Snake**

This endangered snake, found primarily in the Midwest, has a reddish belly and a visible row of round black spots down each side. It feeds on earthworms and slugs in wet meadows and swamp forests. It flattens its body into a ribbonlike position if alarmed.



**Midland (Dekay's) Brown Snake**

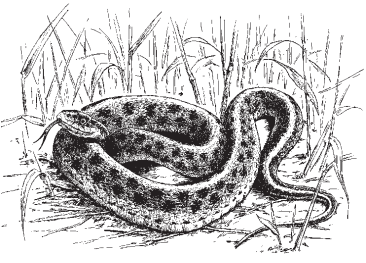
This reptile is often mistaken for a young garter snake. It has two parallel rows of black spots down the back and a brown body. The young have a light band on the neck like the Northern ringneck snake, (see next column) but brown snakes have rough scales. This snake is common in marshes and moist woods.



**Eastern Garter Snake**

Sometimes mistakenly called the "garden" or "gardener" snake, it is seen along trails, in meadows and

beside creeks. Look for brown checks on a greenish-brown back, round eyes and red, forked, black-tipped tongue. Each individual



personality that extends even to preferences in food. This snake flicks its tongue in and out and watches for the motion of earthworms, insects, minnows, tadpoles, frogs, salamanders, birds and small mammals. Prey is grabbed with the teeth and swallowed whole.

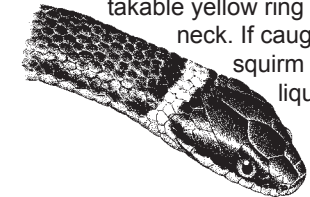
**Ribbon Snake**

This slim relative of the garter snake has a dark slender body with three bright yellow stripes. The middle stripe is sometimes orange or greenish. It stays close to streams and marshes where it feeds on fish and frogs; it rarely eats earthworms. Two almost indistinguishable species of ribbon snakes are found in Indiana.



**Northern Ringneck Snake**

This slender snake hides beneath logs or rotting bark while hunting earthworms, slugs, salamanders and lizards. It has a slate-gray back, yellow belly and unmistakable yellow ring around the neck. If caught, it will twist, squirm and release a foul-smelling liquid that is a combination of musk, feces and urine. The Northern ringneck snake rarely bites.



**Midwest Worm Snake**

This snake version of the earthworm is brown above and has a pink belly and sides. It is secretive and seldom seen, spending most of its time under stones, boards and logs where the ground is moist. It feeds on soft-bodied insects and earthworms.

