



# REPTILES OF OHIO **field guide**

DIVISION OF WILDLIFE



# INTRODUCTION

## CLASS REPTILIA

Reptiles have long fascinated people. In recent years, biologists have recognized that the class *Reptilia* should actually include all of the birds, if it is to include all descendants of a particular ancestral form. This is because crocodiles and alligators are more closely related to birds than to lizards. While this makes sense from a scientific standpoint, in common English usage, the term reptile is still reserved for the alligators and crocodiles (crocodilians), turtles, tortoises, lizards, snakes, and the tuatara, a lizard-like animal found only on several tiny islands off the coast of New Zealand. It is not a lizard, but rather the last representative of a group of reptiles that flourished about 200 million years ago.

Ohio's wealth of natural resources includes almost 50 types of reptiles. As with so many of our wild species, the demands we have placed upon the land have greatly reduced their numbers. All of us must keep in mind that being good stewards of the land requires that we take care of not just some, but all of our natural resources – even the box turtle lumbering across the highway and the harmless gartersnake in the backyard.

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## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

**Family Name** → FAMILY COLUBRIDAE

**Listed Status** → STATUS: OHIO SPECIES OF CONCERN

**Inset Photo with description** → Inset Photo with description: "Playing Dead defense"

**Common Name** → EASTERN HOG-NOSED SNAKE

**Scientific Name** → *Heterodon platirhinos*

**Species Length** → LENGTH: 24" - 36"

**Range Map** → RANGE: A map of Ohio showing the distribution of the species in the northwestern part of the state.

**Page Number** → 30

**Photo Credit** → Photo by: Steve Gamm

**DESCRIPTION:** A matter of death, the completely harmless, hooded snake can put on an act that will frighten the brains of its prey. When first alarmed, this bluffer coils, flutters its head and neck to form a hood and displays a white, yellow and black pattern. The snake usually reacts with the mouth closed - almost always falls short of being killed by people. If the display fails to discourage the intruder, the snake will roll over and play dead. The coloration of this essentially spotted snake is extremely variable, with color phases ranging from yellow and brown to black and gray. The most reliable field mark is the turned-up, log-like snout which is used for digging out the toads that are its primary food.

**HABITAT:** Dry, sandy areas are preferred, especially the Oak Openings region of northwestern Ohio where this generally uncommon snake is most abundant. In southern Ohio, it occurs in most of the hill counties.

● 1970 to present  
■ Historic records prior to 1970

# REPTILES OF OHIO

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# SPECIES ACCOUNTS

FRONT COVER: SMOOTH GREENSNAKE • PHOTO BY: ©KLAUS VARTZBED  
BACK COVER: EASTERN FOXSNAKE • PHOTO BY: ©GREG LIPPS

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PLAINS GARTERSNAKE  
PHOTO BY: ©NINA HARFMANN

# ABOUT THIS BOOK

Below are symbols and information for quick comparisons and identification. They are located in the same place for each species throughout this publication.

## ORDER AND FAMILY

Reptile species appear in taxonomic order. Both "order" and "family" classifications are provided for each species. Species are classified based on their evolutionary relationship to one another.

## COMMON AND SCIENTIFIC NAME

The common and scientific names are based on the most recent version of the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles' publication "Scientific and Standard English Names of Amphibians and Reptiles of North America north of Mexico, with comments on our understanding."

## STATUS

**ENDANGERED** – species is in imminent danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range

**THREATENED** – species that are likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future

**SPECIES OF CONCERN** – species that might become threatened, under continued or increased stress

**UNCOMMON** – localized; infrequent

**COMMON** – widespread and frequent

**COMMON/GAME** – a species that can be legally harvested

## DESCRIPTION

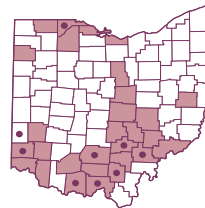
This section includes a description of the species appearance and some life history or behavior notes.

## HABITAT

This section includes a general description of the types of habitat where the species can be found.

## RANGE

The map represents where the species has been recorded in Ohio. A solid dot in a county represents a record occurrence from 1976 to present day. A shaded in county on the map represents historic records prior to 1976. Sightings are possible outside of the recorded counties.



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976

# TURTLES

ORDER TESTUDINES

If we could travel back some 200 million years to the Triassic Period – the early part of the “Age of Reptiles” – we would discover an animal similar to our present day turtles. Unlike most ancient species of wildlife, which have either become extinct or evolved greatly in form, turtles have remained relatively unchanged through the ages.

In Europe, these reptiles were originally classified as tortoises (land turtles), terrapins (hard-shelled freshwater turtles), or turtles (sea turtles). Since many turtles in the New World did not fall neatly into these categories, the meanings have been changed. The term “turtle” now encompasses all aquatic forms. Tortoise is usually applied to the land turtles and terrapin to any of the various edible turtles living in fresh or brackish water, particularly those of the genus *Malaclemys*, the diamondback terrapins. All, however, may be correctly referred to as turtles.

The reproductive biology of turtles is fascinating. With the exception of softshell turtles, the sex of all species of Ohio turtles is dependent on the temperature at which the eggs develop. For instance, snapping turtle eggs that develop at about 77 degrees Fahrenheit will all hatch out as males, while eggs that develop at much higher or lower temperatures will all hatch out as females. In the wild, warmer eggs at the top of a nest may all hatch out as females, while cooler eggs below them hatch out as males.

SNAPPING TURTLE  
PHOTO BY: ©NINA HARFMAN



FAMILY KINOSTERNIDAE STATUS: COMMON

# EASTERN MUSK TURTLE

*Sternotherus odoratus*

LENGTH: 2" – 4"

**DESCRIPTION:** Musk turtles, also known as "stinkpots" are small aquatic turtles and the only musk turtle found in northern states. Their most distinctive marks of identification are the two bright yellow stripes on each side of the head and sensory barbels on the side of the head and neck. These turtles get their name from the foul odor they expel when first caught. This odor comes from a yellowish fluid secreted by two gland openings on either side of the carapace (the upper shell).

**HABITAT:** Musk turtles seem to prefer deep, still water in lakes, ponds, and sluggish streams with muddy bottoms and an abundance of plant life. Like snapping turtles, musk turtles are strongly aquatic and are seldom observed out of water except to lay eggs, or occasionally during early spring to bask in the sun.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



Juvenile



FAMILY CHELYDRIDAE

# SNAPPING TURTLE

STATUS: COMMON/GAME

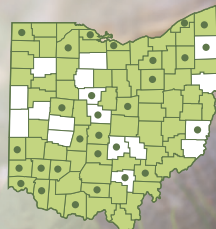
*Chelydra serpentina*

LENGTH: 8" – 14"

**DESCRIPTION:** The snapping turtle is the largest turtle in Ohio. Large specimens may weigh more than 35 pounds and have a carapace more than 14 inches long. Snappers are the only species that have a long tail, and proportionally a huge head. Although the snapping turtle's powerful, keen-edged jaws are capable of doing great damage to a carelessly placed finger, stories of them snapping broom handles in half are greatly exaggerated. However, great caution should be exercised when handling these exceptionally bold and aggressive reptiles. They should always be carried by the base of the tail, with the plastron (lower shell) toward your body, and well away from your legs. Snapping turtles usually provide the meat for turtle soup.

**HABITAT:** Found in permanent bodies of water, as well as ephemeral wetlands and ditches. Snappers seldom bask in the sun except in early spring; therefore, though they are very abundant they are not seen as frequently as most other turtles. From May through June, females may be seen crossing roads in search of sites to lay their eggs.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©TIM DANIEL  
INSET PHOTO BY: ©NINA HARFÄNN

FAMILY EMYDIDAE

# SPOTTED TURTLE

STATUS: THREATENED

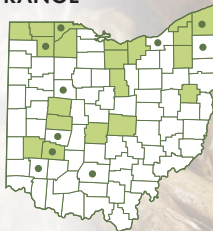
*Clemmys guttata*

LENGTH: 3" – 4"

**DESCRIPTION:** This small, semi aquatic turtle has yellow polka dots all over its carapace, variable in number and distribution. Background coloration is black. The carapace is smooth and relatively flattened. This little reptile should be protected. Because people have destroyed its natural habitat by altering wetlands, spotted turtle populations have declined greatly throughout Ohio. This turtle is also threatened by the illegal pet trade. The spotted turtle is most frequently observed in early spring, basking along stream or wetland banks, or on objects protruding from the water. When disturbed, it may quickly dive for safety; or it may leisurely walk into the water and swim to the bottom where it may remain motionless, burrow into the muck, or crawl beneath some sheltering object such as a submerged log.

**HABITAT:** This handsome turtle shows a marked preference for the shallow, sluggish waters of wet prairies and meadows, fens, bogs, marshes, small streams, ditches, and pond edges, especially where vegetation is abundant. It occasionally wanders away from water and lives in wet woods.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN



# WOODLAND BOX TURTLE

FAMILY EMYDIDAE

STATUS: SPECIES OF CONCERN

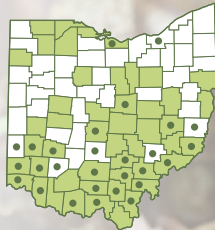
*Terrapene carolina carolina*

LENGTH: 4.5"–6"

**DESCRIPTION:** The high-domed carapace of the box turtle may carry a wide variety of markings. Usually it is dark brown or black, accented with some combination of yellow streaks or blotches. The box turtle gets its name from its centrally hinged plastron (lower shell), which enables both front and rear portions of the plastron to be drawn up tightly against the carapace (upper shell). This "boxes in" the turtle for protection. Aside from the loss of habitat, a significant threat to Ohio's box turtles is being run over as they lumber across roadways. They are also illegally collected and kept as pets.

**HABITAT:** Found in woodlands throughout Ohio, the box turtle is our most terrestrial turtle. During the heat of summer, this docile animal spends the day hidden beneath rotting logs, decaying leaves, and other plant debris, venturing out only during early morning or evening. A sudden shower after a dry spell will usually bring out box turtles in large numbers.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©NINA HARFANN

FAMILY EMYDIDAE **STATUS: THREATENED**

# BLANDING'S TURTLE

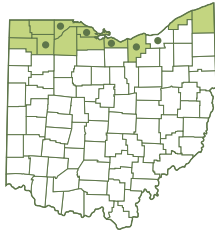
*Emydoidea blandingii*

LENGTH: 6" – 9"

**DESCRIPTION:** The most distinctive field mark is its bright yellow throat and chin, which can easily be seen from some distance away. The shape of their mouth makes it appear that they are always smiling. Carapace is dark gray to brown, and covered with yellow spots that fuse to form streaks. Like the woodland box turtle, the Blanding's turtle has a hinged plastron. However, it is not as functional as that of the box turtle because the front lobe of the plastron cannot be closed tightly. This turtle is named for William Blanding, the early Philadelphia naturalist who first described it.

**HABITAT:** Ohio's Blanding's turtles are limited primarily to the northern counties along Lake Erie, where they inhabit the marshy shorelines, inland streams, wet meadows, and swamp forests. Although essentially aquatic, the Blanding's turtle often travels overland as it moves among different wetlands throughout the year.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©TIM DANIEL

FAMILY EMYDIDAE STATUS: COMMON

# NORTHERN MAP TURTLE

*Graptemys geographica*

LENGTH: ♂ 3.5"–6.25"  
♀ 7"–10.75"

**DESCRIPTION:** The female of this species attains a carapace length of about 10 inches, while the male seldom exceeds five inches. The carapace in cross section is shaped like an A-frame tent. The map turtle's name is derived from the network of fine yellow lines that crisscross the carapace and vaguely resemble the contour lines on a topographic map. These lines are very noticeable on young specimens but they fade with age. A more or less longitudinal yellow spot behind the eye is distinctive among the yellow lines on the neck.

**HABITAT:** Map turtles are extremely wary and show a marked preference for sizable bodies of deep water, such as large rivers and lakes, where they can dive to the safety of the depths. The broad, flat crushing surfaces of the powerful jaws are well suited for consuming snails, crayfish, and clams, which form the bulk of the diet. Map turtles may be active year-round.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976

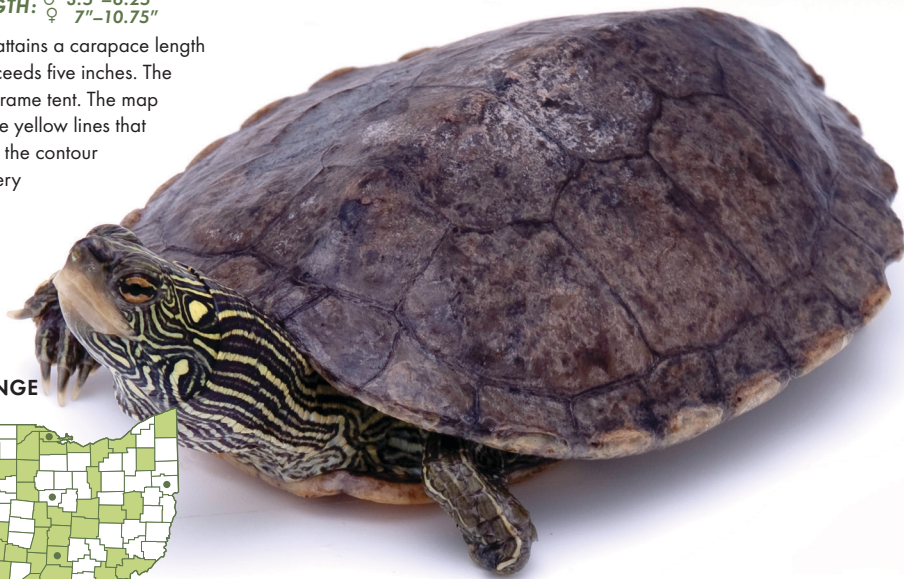


PHOTO BY: ©TIM DANIEL

FAMILY EMYDIDAE

# Ouachita Map Turtle

STATUS: SPECIES OF CONCERN

*Graptemys ouachitensis*

LENGTH: ♂ 3.5"–5.75"  
♀ 5"–10.75"

**DESCRIPTION:** Differentiating between an Ouachita and Northern map turtle can be very difficult, especially if the turtle is not in hand. Pay close attention to the yellow spot behind the eye. On an Ouachita map turtle the spot is shaped like a sickle or hockey stick and extends to the top of the head. Also note the two yellow spots below the eye of an Ouachita map turtle, one on the upper jaw and one on the lower.

**HABITAT:** Previously thought to be limited to the lower reaches of the Scioto River, recent surveys reported the Ouachita map turtle in the Muskingum and Great Miami Rivers, indicating its distribution may be more widespread.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

FAMILY EMYDIDAE STATUS: COMMON

# MIDLAND PAINTED TURTLE

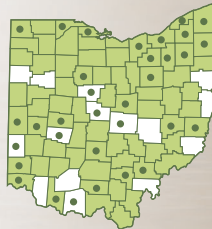
*Chrysemys picta marginata*

LENGTH: 4.5" – 6.5"

**DESCRIPTION:** Midland painted turtles are among the most abundant and certainly the most conspicuous turtles in Ohio. The deep green carapace is brightly patterned with red and black along the underside of the marginal plates. The patterns look as if they were painted on by hand. There are several subspecies of painted turtles in the United States, but only the midland painted turtle occurs in Ohio. Although an occasional individual may attempt to bite when first captured, these turtles usually become very tame. Adult male painted turtles have elongated claws on their front feet, which they use to "tickle" the female's neck during courtship.

**HABITAT:** They are particularly fond of basking and can be seen by the dozens on logs and along the banks of most bodies of water through the summer and even during warm winter days. With the coming of winter, midland painted turtles seek deep water and burrow into the mud or debris at the bottom.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



Juvenile



PHOTO BY: ©TIM DANIEL  
INSET PHOTO BY: ©NINA HARFMAN

FAMILY EMYDIDAE

# RED-EARED SLIDER

STATUS: COMMON

*Trachemys scripta elegans*

LENGTH: 5"–8"

**DESCRIPTION:** This is the little green turtle that has been sold by the thousands in pet and variety stores. Perhaps the most distinctive marking is the broad reddish patch behind each eye. In rare instances, the red is replaced by yellow or may be so dark as to not be visible at all. Outside of a few southern Ohio counties, most populations of red-eared sliders in the state are probably the result of discarded pets. Releasing pets into the wild is illegal and may endanger our native wildlife.

**HABITAT:** Although these turtles are common in areas far south of Ohio, isolated communities have been discovered in some northern states. Whether released captives or remnants of an ancient population from a warmer age, they manage to hold their own. This turtle is also fond of basking and can be seen on logs and along the banks of many types of bodies of water through the summer.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



Red-ear detail



PHOTOS BY: ©NINA HARFMANN

FAMILY TRIONYCHIDAE STATUS: COMMON/GAME

# EASTERN SPINY SOFTSHELL

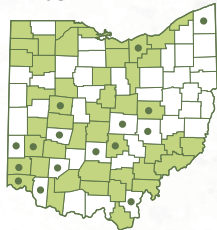
*Apalone spinifera spinifera*

LENGTH: ♂ 5"–9"  
♀ 7"–17"

**DESCRIPTION:** The spiny softshell's body, instead of being protected by bony plates, has a tough, rubbery covering. At the front of the carapace is a row of small, conical spines that account for the name "spiny." What this turtle lacks in heavy protective armor, it makes up for in speed and disposition. It is every bit as aggressive as the snapping turtle and its swimming ability far surpasses that of other turtles.

**HABITAT:** Although it can be found in lakes and smaller streams, the Eastern spiny softshell is essentially a river turtle. It prefers relatively shallow water with a sand or soft mud bottom. A common habit of the softshell is to settle on the bottom by rocking from side to side, while flipping sand and mud up onto its back, completely burying itself.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©MATT JEPSON

FAMILY TRIONYCHIDAE STATUS: COMMON/GAME

# MIDLAND SMOOTH SOFTSHELL

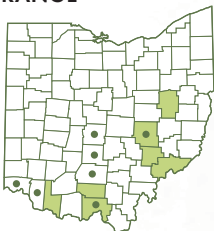
*Apalone mutica mutica*

LENGTH: ♂ 4"–7"  
♀ 6"–14"

**DESCRIPTION:** Unlike its Eastern spiny relative, the midland smooth softshell has no spines or other projections on its carapace. Also, unlike the spiny softshell, its nostrils are not ridged and its feet are not strongly spotted or streaked. Marks on the carapace of the midland smooth softshell consist of irregular small dots and dashes, unlike the much larger dark circular spots found on the Eastern spiny softshell. As with the spiny softshell, the females of the smooth softshell are much larger than the males.

**HABITAT:** The midland smooth softshell is limited primarily to southern and southeastern Ohio where it inhabits the larger tributaries of the Ohio River, particularly the Scioto River. They are especially fond of shallow water areas along sandbars.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



Juvenile



PHOTOS BY: ©SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



# LIZARDS

ORDER SQUAMATA

SUBORDER LACERTILIA

Lizards are closely related to snakes and belong to the same order (*Squamata*). Unlike snakes, lizards usually have four legs, external ear openings, and movable eyelids. Instead of the snake's single row of ventral scales, lizards have several rows of scales on their undersides.

Male lizards and snakes are unique among vertebrates in having two copulatory organs. The structures are stored in the base of the tail. One or the other of these structures is used during breeding. The gender of some species of lizards and snakes can be determined by noting the presence, in males, or absence, in females of the "hemipenes."

There should be no confusion between salamanders (which are amphibians) and lizards – salamanders have smooth, slimy skin and their toes have no claws. Lizards have rough, dry, scaly skin and claws on their toes. There are about 90 species of lizards in America, most of which are native to the Southwest. There are four species native to Ohio, and one exotic species has become established. They are very beneficial, feeding largely on insects such as grasshoppers, crickets, beetles, and various insect larvae.



MALE BROAD-HEADED SKINK  
PHOTO BY: ©CHAD BLANKENSHIP

FAMILY PHRYNOSOMATIDAE STATUS: COMMON

# EASTERN FENCE LIZARD

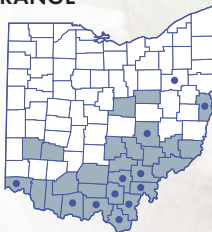
*Sceloporus undulatus*

LENGTH: 4"–7.25"

**DESCRIPTION:** Unlike skinks, fence lizards belong to a group of rough-scaled reptiles called spiny lizards. They are tree climbers. When encountered on the ground, fence lizards will usually dart to the nearest tree, climb up the side opposite their pursuer, and remain motionless. If they are approached closely, they will continue up the trunk, making sure always to stay on the side opposite the pursuer. Males can be distinguished from females by the dark blue band, outlined in black, across their throat and an iridescent patch of blue on each side of the belly. The male's back is less distinctly patterned than the female.

**HABITAT:** Although found in a variety of habitats, fence lizards seem to prefer the dry, wooded hillsides and rocky cliffs that characterize most of unglaciated Ohio.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN

FAMILY SCINCIDAE      STATUS: UNCOMMON

# LITTLE BROWN SKINK (GROUND SKINK)

*Scincella lateralis*

LENGTH: 3" – 5.75"

**DESCRIPTION:** The best field mark is the dark brown stripe, bordered by dark brown or black, running down the length of the back. The juveniles do not have the blue tails that the other skinks possess. Lower eyelid has 2-3 transparent scales so they can see even when the eyelids are shut to protect the cornea.

**HABITAT:** This very small skink is limited to the extreme southern part of the state where it seems to prefer open areas in or adjacent to woods. It may be found by turning over large stones and by sifting through fallen leaves. Although it is one of the least common lizards encountered in Ohio, it may be abundant where it is found.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN

FAMILY SCINCIDAE

STATUS: COMMON

# COMMON FIVE-LINED SKINK

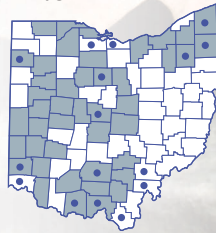
*Plestiodon fasciatus*

LENGTH: 5" – 8.5"

**DESCRIPTION:** Skinks are among the fastest reptiles in the world, and when encountered they dart quickly for cover. Individuals almost always bite when first captured, but their extremely small teeth cannot penetrate the skin. The tail of the five-lined skink, which is blue in young animals, serves as a most unusual defense mechanism. If a skink is grabbed by the tail, the tail breaks off. While the would-be captor's attention is held momentarily by the vigorously wiggling tail, the skink makes a speedy getaway. In time, the skink will grow a new tail, although it will not be as long or as brightly colored as the original one.

**HABITAT:** Five-lined skinks occur throughout Ohio. They can often be located under the bark of decaying logs, in stumps, rock and log piles, and decaying plant material as well as abandoned farm buildings and roadside debris.

#### RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN

FAMILY SCINCIDAE

# BROAD-HEADED SKINK

STATUS: UNCOMMON

*Plestiodon laticeps*

LENGTH: 6.5" – 12.75"

**DESCRIPTION:** The broad-headed skink is the largest lizard in Ohio. The female and young closely resemble the female and young of the five-lined skink. Young specimens even have a bright blue tail. Large males become a uniform olive-brown and have considerable red coloration on the head, most prominently during the spring breeding season. The back of the head is greatly enlarged or swollen as well.

**HABITAT:** This skink is essentially a woodland inhabitant. It is found only in several counties in the southern half of the state and is rare even there. Occasionally, broad-headed skinks can be observed high in the branches of dead trees. It has the distinction of being the most arboreal of our four species of skinks.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN

FAMILY LACERTIDAE STATUS: INVASIVE ALIEN

# COMMON (EUROPEAN) WALL LIZARD

*Podarcis muralis*

LENGTH: 5.5" – 8.125"

**DESCRIPTION:** This exotic species was introduced into Cincinnati in 1951 and has become well established. Sometimes referred to locally as "Lazarus lizards," the common wall lizards were brought to eastern Cincinnati from northern Italy by a local resident after a vacation near Milan and were released in a backyard. The lizards can now be found in several areas in Hamilton, Butler, and Clermont Counties and have established themselves in neighboring Kentucky and Indiana, with population densities of 1,500 per acre in good habitat. It is unknown what effects the common wall lizard will have on native species, but their spread should be discouraged. It is illegal to release this or other animals into the wild in Ohio.

**HABITAT:** The lizards are primarily found along old rock walls, railroad tracks, refuse piles, or occasionally in rocky ravines. Because they have persisted for many years and survived through record-setting severe winters, they are considered permanent residents.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: © JAMES LELACHEUR

# ≡ SNAKES

ORDER SQUAMATA

SUBORDER SERPENTES

Probably no animals on earth have suffered more from human ignorance and superstition than snakes. This is a misapprehension, since most snakes are both docile and fascinating.

Without arms or legs, snakes use their muscles to move swiftly across the ground, through water, and along tree branches. They are near-sighted and therefore depend heavily on their sense of smell. Contrary to popular belief, the snake's forked tongue does not carry a stinger, but instead is a smelling device. Each time it is flicked out, it gathers minute particles from the air. In the roof of the mouth are two small cavities called Jacobson's organs. The tongue deposits the particles here and the sensory cells of these cavities help the brain interpret them as odors. Pit vipers, in addition to their organs of smell, have heat sensitive pits resembling an extra pair of nostrils near the front and sides of their head. These pits can detect the body heat of small, warm-blooded animals.

Snakes have a specialized mouth construction which enables them to swallow their prey whole. The lower jaw bone is in two parts, joined together at the chin by highly elastic tissue. In addition, the upper and lower jaws can be disengaged to further enlarge the mouth opening so prey larger than the snake's head can be swallowed. Unlike most animals, which cannot digest bones, fur, and feathers, the snake has exceptionally powerful digestive juices that are even capable of digesting teeth.



PHOTO BY: ©NINA HARFMANN

# QUEENSNAKE

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE

*Regina septemvittata*

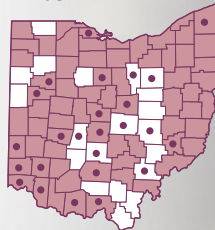
STATUS: SPECIES OF CONCERN

LENGTH: 14"–18"

**DESCRIPTION:** The queensnake is the smallest and most slender of Ohio's watersnakes. Their plain, olive, drab-down bodies have a longitudinal yellowish stripe on the lower sides, as well as four chestnut-brown stripes on the belly. When captured, queensnakes use their musk glands freely to escape. Although they become gentle with handling, they seldom eat in captivity. For this reason, they do not make hardy captives.

**HABITAT:** The decidedly aquatic queensnake prefers slow moving or shallow rocky creeks and rivers where it feeds primarily upon soft-shelled crayfish. These snakes are frequently found under large flat stones, boards, or other debris along streams, or seen basking in willows and other shrubs along the banks.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN



FAMILY COLUBRIDAE STATUS: THREATENED

# KIRTLAND'S SNAKE

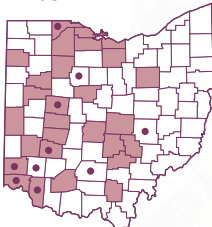
*Clonophis kirtlandii*

LENGTH: 12"–15"

**DESCRIPTION:** Kirtland's snakes can easily be identified by the bright red belly conspicuously marked with a row of black spots along each side. Like the Kirtland's warbler, the Kirtland's snake was named for Doctor Jared P. Kirtland, an early physician and nationally renowned naturalist from Lakewood, in Cuyahoga County, Ohio.

**HABITAT:** Although encountered only occasionally, Kirtland's snake ranges throughout the glaciated western half of Ohio and into a few glacial outwash-filled valleys in southwestern Ohio. Its secretive nature and marked preference for wet meadows make it difficult to find. In addition to natural areas, Kirtland's snakes may also be found in the urban areas of Cincinnati, Dayton, and Toledo.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



belly detail



PHOTOS BY: ©NINA HARFMAN

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE STATUS: COMMON

# NORTHERN WATERSNAKE

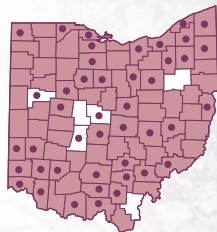
*Nerodia sipedon sipedon*

LENGTH: 24"–42"

**DESCRIPTION:** The northern watersnake is one of the most widely distributed and certainly one of the most abundant snakes in Ohio. It may inhabit just about any permanent body of water. This stout-bodied snake shows extreme variations in color and pattern and is unfortunately confused by many with the venomous water moccasin, or cottonmouth. The cottonmouth, however, does not occur in Ohio. Watersnakes usually flee from people, but when grabbed, they are quick to defend themselves. They bite viciously and large ones are capable of producing painful, deep lacerations. When picked up, they invariably secrete an obnoxious smelling substance from their musk glands.

**HABITAT:** Northern watersnakes are particularly fond of basking and can often be seen sunning upon logs, stumps, and rocks, or on low branches overhanging the water. They are very wary and when disturbed drop into the water and disappear quickly.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©TIM DANIEL

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE STATUS: COMMON

# LAKE ERIE WATERSNAKE

*Nerodia sipedon insularum*

LENGTH: 24"– 42"

**DESCRIPTION:** A subspecies of the northern watersnake, the Lake Erie watersnake is similar to its relative, except that the dark pattern of crossbands is very pale or completely missing. The general coloration is gray, greenish, or brownish. The belly is white or pale yellow, occasionally tinged with pink or orange down the center. The favorite food of the Lake Erie watersnake is the round goby, an invasive aquatic nuisance species.

**HABITAT:** These snakes are limited to the islands of Lake Erie. The snake has benefited from the construction of docks and shoreline protection done in a snake-friendly manner demonstrating its ability to coexist with people.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©TIM DANIEL

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE

**COPPER-BELLIED WATERSNAKE**

STATUS: ENDANGERED

*Nerodia erythrogaster*

LENGTH: 36"–48"

**DESCRIPTION:** Copper-bellied watersnake is the most terrestrial of the three species of watersnakes in Ohio. The adult is a uniform black or brownish-black above, with a beautiful orange-red or scarlet belly. The copper-bellied watersnake was first described from a former swamp forest east of Mt. Victory in Hardin County by Ohio herpetologist Roger Conant. Like their cousin the northern watersnake, copper-bellied watersnakes readily bite when captured. The subspecies status of this snake was recently reviewed and is now considered to be classified at the species-level as the plain-bellied watersnake.

**HABITAT:** This stout-bodied watersnake is currently known to occur only in Williams County, although small, widely scattered remnant populations may occur elsewhere. Copper-bellied watersnakes spend a great deal of time on land, moving among temporary and permanent wetlands, including swampy woodlands and river bottoms.

**RANGE**



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE STATUS: COMMON

# DEKAY'S BROWNSNAKE

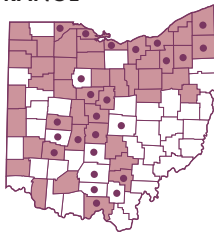
*Storeria dekayi*

LENGTH: 8"– 12"

**DESCRIPTION:** This snake used to be categorized as two subspecies, the Northern and midland brownsnakes. There are no longer any subspecies recognized in this genus. The brownsnake is a small brown snake with two rows of dark spots running down the back. Brownsnakes rarely bite when captured. Their only real defense is the musk glands which they freely exercise when first captured.

**HABITAT:** These common but secretive little snakes are often encountered hiding under stones, logs, old boards, and other such debris, where they feed extensively on snails, slugs, worms, and soft-bodied insects.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©NINA HARFMAN

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE      STATUS: UNCOMMON

# RED-BELLIED SNAKE

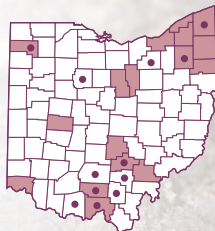
*Storeria occipitomaculata*

LENGTH: 8"– 10"

**DESCRIPTION:** The red-bellied is one of the smallest snakes in Ohio. A uniformly scarlet or red-orange belly and three usually well-defined light blotches immediately behind the head are the most distinctive characteristics. Many specimens of this snake have a distinct purple tinge to the normal brown color and all black (melanistic) individuals are not uncommon in some populations. Like its close relative the Dekay's brownsnake, it makes no attempt to bite, even when first captured. Some individuals may curl their upper "lip" outward showing off their tiny teeth, a behavior that is not fully understood by biologists.

**HABITAT:** This snake may be found in sphagnum bogs, wet meadows, or swamp forests, as well as dry, open wooded areas in the eastern half of the state. Very secretive, the red-bellied snake spends most of its life hidden beneath boards, rotting logs, brush piles, and leaves, where it seeks out slugs, earthworms, and beetle larvae.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



Normal brown color



Purple tinge color

PHOTO BY: ©NINA HARMANN  
INSET PHOTO BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE

# EASTERN HOG-NOSED SNAKE

STATUS: SPECIES OF CONCERN

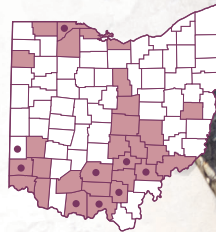
*Heterodon platirhinos*

LENGTH: 24" – 36"

**DESCRIPTION:** A master of deceit, the completely harmless hog-nosed snake can put on an act that will frighten the bravest of people. When first alarmed, this bluffer coils, flattens its head and neck to form a cobra-like hood, inflates its body, hisses fiercely, and strikes violently. The strike – usually made with the mouth closed – almost always falls short of the target. This act is so convincing that it often leads to the snake being killed by people. If the display fails to dissuade the harasser, the snake will roll over and play dead. The coloration of this essentially spotted snake is extremely variable, with color phases ranging from yellow and brown to black and gray. The most reliable field mark is the turned-up, hog-like snout which is used for digging out the toads that are its primary food.

**HABITAT:** Dry, sandy areas are preferred, especially the Oak Openings region of northwestern Ohio where this generally uncommon snake is most abundant. In southern Ohio, it occurs in most of the hill counties.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



"Playing Dead" defense



PHOTOS BY: ©TIM DANIEL

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE

**EASTERN SMOOTH EARTHSNAKE**

STATUS: SPECIES OF CONCERN

*Virginia valeriae valeriae*

LENGTH: 7"– 10"

**DESCRIPTION:** Although similar to the Dekay's brownsnake, the Eastern smooth earthsnake lacks the pattern of the brownsnake and is more stout-bodied. It is a small, plain gray or brownish snake with a plain white or yellowish belly. Many are marked with a number of small black dots on the back. The distinctly small head and lack of distinctive body markings are good identifiers. Unlike the wormsnake, the Eastern smooth earthsnake gives birth to live young.

**HABITAT:** Although rare over much of its range, the Eastern smooth earthsnake is often common locally. In Ohio, it occurs only in the southern quarter of the state, especially in the forested area of Shawnee and Pike state forests. This reptile is very secretive and spends most of its time hiding beneath flat stones and similar objects.

**RANGE**



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN



FAMILY COLUBRIDAE

STATUS: COMMON

# NORTHERN RING-NECKED SNAKE

*Diadophis punctatus edwardsii*

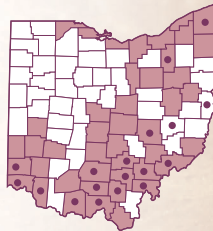
LENGTH: 10"–16"

**DESCRIPTION:** As the name implies, these little snakes have a ring around the neck that is yellow or yellowish orange. Unlike most egg laying snakes, ring-necked snakes tend to deposit their eggs in a community nest, frequently in rotted logs exposed to the sun.

When routed from a hiding place, ring-necked snakes usually seek cover under the nearest available object. They are normally mild-tempered when first caught, but discharge a pungent substance from their musk glands and wiggle violently to escape.

**HABITAT:** Ring-necked snakes occur throughout Ohio except for the west-central and extreme northwest counties. They prefer rocky, wooded hillsides and cutover wooded areas such as those in southeastern Ohio, where they abound. Ring-necked snakes are basically nocturnal and spend most of the day concealed beneath logs, stones, boards, and similar objects.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN  
INSET PHOTO BY: ©NINA HARFMANN

# **FAMILY COLUBRIDAE** *COMMON WORMSNAKE*

**STATUS: UNCOMMON**

**LENGTH: 8"–10"**

*Carphophis amoenus helenae* (Midwestern) / *Carphophis amoenus amoenus* (Eastern)

**DESCRIPTION:** Probably no snake more closely resembles an earthworm than the wormsnake. They have a small, pinkish brown body, shiny iridescent scales, and a small, narrow head which is not distinct from the translucent body. Although wormsnakes do not bite, when handled they continually try to push between one's fingers with both their head and tail – which has a spine-like tip. This tail spine has deceived some people into believing that snakes have stingers; however, no snake has a stinger. Worms and soft-bodied insects make up the bulk of the wormsnake's diet. This snake is an egg layer. The Eastern wormsnake has 4 scales between its eyes; the Midwestern has only two.

**HABITAT:** These reptile versions of the nightcrawler are rarely encountered in the open, but can be discovered under large, flat slabs of rock, logs, and other debris. They show a marked preference for moist earth, such as hillside seeps. During dry weather, wormsnakes work deep into the ground, seeking moisture.

## **RANGE**



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN

# FAMILY COLUBRIDAE

# NORTH AMERICAN RACER

STATUS: COMMON

*Coluber constrictor constrictor/Coluber constrictor foxii* LENGTH: 36"– 60"

**DESCRIPTION:** Both the Northern black racer and its relative, the blue racer, occur in Ohio. The blue racer – a gunmetal gray with a distinct greenish or bluish cast – frequents western Ohio. The Northern black racer – a uniform medium or plain black throughout – occurs in eastern Ohio. Although racers are among the swiftest and most graceful of all our snakes, their top speed is only eight to 10 miles an hour. They are extremely nervous and become very aggressive when an attempt is made to capture them. They strike viciously and can inflict a painful bite with their small, but numerous teeth. When alarmed, they rapidly vibrate the tip of their tail, as do many other species of snakes. Racers rely more on vision than other snake species, and will often approach a person or other potential predator.

**HABITAT:** Racers occupy a variety of habitats including fencerows, fields, and grasslands, edges of ponds and streams, and woodlands. Racers are excellent climbers; some have observed them 2 to 3 meters from the ground in early spring.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTOS BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE  
**GRAY (BLACK) RATSNAKE**

STATUS: COMMON

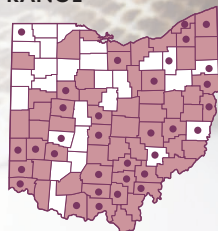
*Pantherophis spiloides*

LENGTH: 42"–72"

**DESCRIPTION:** Previously called the black ratsnake, recent genetics research has improved our understanding of ratsnake evolution, resulting in the changes to the common and scientific names. This is Ohio's largest snake. Although it is typically four to six feet long, individuals have been known to exceed eight feet. The gray ratsnake differs from the black racer in its dorsal pattern. The adult black racer has no dorsal pattern at all. Most gray ratsnakes have at least a semblance of a pattern, and many have a very significant pattern, produced by coloration of the skin between the scales. When first encountered, most gray ratsnakes freeze in position, blending in with their surroundings. They remain motionless until grasped. Although some offer little or no resistance when first captured, many will vibrate their tail rapidly and strike repeatedly. When picked up, they usually coil tightly about the arm and discharge a foul-smelling substance from the anal scent glands.

**HABITAT:** An essentially forest-dwelling snake, the gray ratsnake occurs throughout most of Ohio, with the exception of most of northwest Ohio, especially in the range of the Eastern foxsnake. It is an accomplished climber and is often found high in trees, frequently taking shelter in woodpecker holes and other cavities. Gray ratsnakes often hibernate in rock crevices in the company of other snakes, such as copperheads and rattlesnakes.

**RANGE**



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



Juvenile



Adult

PHOTOS BY: ©NINA HARFMAN

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE

# EASTERN FOXSNAKE

STATUS: SPECIES OF CONCERN

*Pantherophis vulpinus*

LENGTH: 48"– 60"

**DESCRIPTION:** The Eastern foxsnake, sometimes referred to as the "hardwood rattler", is a timid and beautiful large snake. They are patterned with reddish-brown blotches on a yellowish or beige background. Most Eastern foxsnakes are docile, even when first captured. Unfortunately, their coppery head often causes them to be killed – mistaken for copperheads. Their habit of vibrating their tail when alarmed, together with the bold black and yellow coloration, may lead to their being mistaken for rattlesnakes. Like their cousin the gray ratsnake, foxsnakes are true constrictors, using their muscular bodies to kill their prey. While not as agile tree climbers as the gray ratsnake, foxsnakes are better swimmers.

**HABITAT:** Along the southwest-ern shores of Lake Erie, west of Sandusky, one may encounter the Eastern foxsnake. The handsomely marked snake inhabits many Lake Erie islands as well as the extensive marshes of Lucas, Ottawa, Sandusky, and Erie counties.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976

PHOTO BY: ©TIM DANIEL

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE

# EASTERN BLACK KINGSNAKE

STATUS: SPECIES OF CONCERN

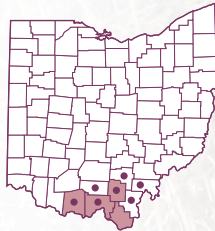
*Lampropeltis nigra*

LENGTH: 42"–72"

**DESCRIPTION:** The Eastern black kingsnake is a handsomely marked constrictor. They are shiny black and almost always show a pattern of small yellowish or white dots or specks along the sides of the body. Their diet includes small mammals, lizards, birds, and small snakes – including venomous species. Kingsnakes are immune to normal quantities of venom from all of our native venomous snakes. Although often pugnacious when first encountered, with handling they soon become extremely gentle.

**HABITAT:** This snake is limited in Ohio to Adams, Scioto, Jackson, and Lawrence counties, and even in this area it is relatively uncommon. It shows a marked preference for the Scioto and Ohio River bottomlands. Except in early spring and fall when they bask in the open, these snakes are very secretive, spending the day beneath logs, rocks, and the like, and emerging to hunt by night.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE STATUS: COMMON

# EASTERN MILK SNAKE

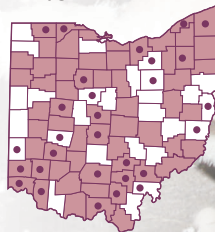
*Lampropeltis triangulum*

LENGTH: 42"–72"

**DESCRIPTION:** When first encountered, the milksnake either remains motionless or attempts to crawl away. If thoroughly pestered, it may vibrate the tip of its tail rapidly and strike repeatedly. However, the teeth can barely puncture the skin. The belly has a black and white checkerboard pattern. A Y-shaped or V-shaped light-colored blotch is usually present on the nape of the neck. The milksnake is a true constrictor. It usually throws several loops of its muscular body around its prey. These coils do not crush but merely exert enough pressure to prevent breathing and stop the heart. The victim soon dies and is then swallowed whole.

**HABITAT:** Commonly encountered throughout Ohio in a variety of habitats, including woods, meadows, and river bottoms – even within cities, where they occasionally enter buildings in search of mice. Their frequent occurrence in rodent-infested barns led to the fallacy that they milk cows by night; hence the name milksnake.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



Checkerboard belly pattern



PHOTOS BY: ©GREG LIPPS

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE  
**EASTERN GARTERSNAKE**

STATUS: COMMON

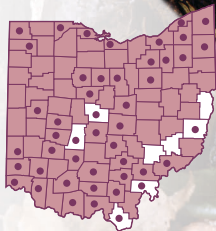
*Thamnophis sirtalis sirtalis*

LENGTH: 18"–24"

**DESCRIPTION:** The name "gartersnake" derives from the longitudinal stripes on the body which resemble the design on once-stylish sock garters. The Eastern gartersnake is normally marked with a pattern of three light stripes on a darker background. One stripe runs down the center of the back with a lateral stripe on the second and third rows of scales on each side. These stripes are usually yellow, but may be shades of green, brown, or blue. In some snakes, the lateral stripes are dominated or replaced by dark spots. This snake is one of the most variably colored and patterned species in the world. Along the Western basin of Lake Erie, up to 50 percent of individuals may be melanistic (completely black), with the exception of some white on the chin. The dark color helps the snake warm more quickly when basking in the sunlight.

**HABITAT:** This most common of Ohio's gartersnakes is found across the state. Found in moist areas, such as damp woods and grasslands, and the edge of ponds, lakes, streams, and rivers.

**RANGE**



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



Melanistic



PHOTOS BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN



FAMILY COLUBRIDAE      STATUS: ENDANGERED

# PLAINS GARTERSNAKE

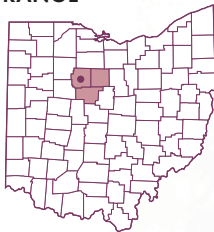
*Thamnophis radix*

LENGTH: 18"–24"

**DESCRIPTION:** Ohio has an isolated colony of Plains gartersnakes. This gartersnake is more vividly colored than the other gartersnake species in Ohio. A distinctive feature is the lateral stripes along the third and fourth rows of scales. Their dorsal stripe is more orange than their yellow lateral stripes.

**HABITAT:** These brightly marked gartersnakes occur only in Wyandot County, in the vicinity of the Killdeer Plains Wildlife Area where they inhabit remnants of what was once the most extensive wet prairie in Ohio.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©MATT JEPSON

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE

# BUTLER'S GARTERSNAKE

STATUS: UNCOMMON

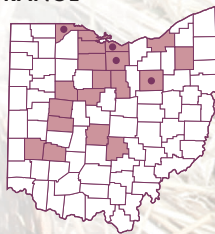
*Thamnophis butleri*

LENGTH: 16"–20"

**DESCRIPTION:** Butler's gartersnake has a lateral stripe that covers the third row of scales as well as the adjacent halves of rows two and four. Unlike the more general diet of the Eastern gartersnake, Butler's gartersnakes feed predominantly on earthworms and leeches. The noticeably smaller head of the Butler's gartersnake is probably a result of this specialization. This snake has an unusual escape behavior characteristic of exaggerated wriggling so that the snake appears to be moving more laterally than forward. This snake was named for Amos Butler, an early Indiana naturalist.

**HABITAT:** This is chiefly an inhabitant of flat, open fields. Although its range covers most of glaciated Ohio, the Butler's gartersnake occurs only in isolated colonies. They may utilize disturbed environments, such as parks and fallow agricultural fields.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



Color variation shown

PHOTOS BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE STATUS: SPECIES OF CONCERN

# SHORT-HEADED GARTERSNAKE

*Thamnophis brachystoma*

LENGTH: 14"–18"

**DESCRIPTION:** The short-headed gartersnake is Ohio's smallest gartersnake. It has a lateral stripe that covers the third row of scales as well as the adjacent halves of rows two and four. It has a very small head with a width similar to its body giving the appearance of having "no neck". Short-headed gartersnakes feed predominantly on earthworms.

**HABITAT:** This gartersnake is an inhabitant of old fields and meadows that are associated with streams and marshes. The short-headed gartersnake occurs only in isolated colonies in and around Youngstown.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



Hypomelanistic



PHOTOS BY: ©BRIAN S. GRAY

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE

# EASTERN RIBBONSNAKE

STATUS: UNCOMMON

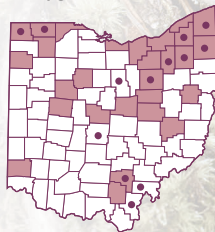
LENGTH: 14"–18"

*Thamnophis saurita sauritus* (Common) / *Thamnophis saurita septentrionalis* (Northern)

**DESCRIPTION:** Ribbonsnakes and gartersnakes may easily be confused. The ribbonsnake has an exceptionally long tail that accounts for one-fourth to one-third of its total length. The gartersnakes have a relatively short tail, usually five inches or less. Unlike other members of the gartersnake group, ribbonsnakes prefer to feed upon aquatic creatures such as small fish, tadpoles, salamanders, small frogs, and toads. Ribbonsnakes are very high strung and, even after being in captivity for a long time, will dart about nervously at the slightest movement. The two subspecies can be differentiated by range: The Northern being in the north part of the state; the Common resides in the Allegheny Plateau.

**HABITAT:** These semi-aquatic snakes seldom venture far from water. As a rule, they frequent the margins of small lakes, ponds, swamps, wet prairies and meadows, and occasionally moist woods throughout Ohio. The small, trim ribbonsnake is more at home on shore than in the water.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE      STATUS: SPECIES OF CONCERN

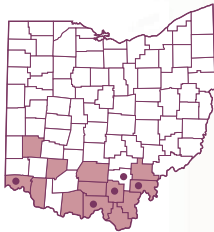
# NORTHERN ROUGH GREENSNAKE

*Opheodrys aestivus aestivus*      LENGTH: 24"–30"

**DESCRIPTION:** The rough greensnake is seldom observed because of its cryptic coloration. The green color and microhabitat use of trees and shrubs leads to this snake not being seen until it moves. Once encountered, they may freeze immobile or drop off the branch into the air to avoid capture. Individuals may gape open the mouth in an apparent threatening posture, although a rare bite would do virtually no harm. It is much more likely to musk as a defense mechanism.

**HABITAT:** The rough greensnake is found in southern Ohio. Much longer than the smooth greensnake, it is more arboreal and has rough instead of smooth scales. They are more likely to be encountered along willow-lined streams. Females lay their eggs in communal nests often in hollow trees on upland sites.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN

FAMILY COLUBRIDAE  
**SMOOTH GREENSNAKE**

STATUS: ENDANGERED

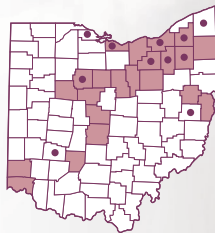
*Opheodrys vernalis*

LENGTH: 10"–20"

**DESCRIPTION:** Considered by many to be one of the most attractive snakes in Ohio, most sightings of the smooth greensnake consist of a rapid glimpse of green moving in the grass or weeds. If one is lucky or fast enough, then it may be possible to catch one of these small, slender snakes. More often they are caught when surprised under objects. When captured they seldom make any effort to bite and usually excrete a foul-smelling musk. The smooth greensnake is often called the "Grass Snake." Their solid green body has a lighter colored belly.

**HABITAT:** This dainty little snake is found in southwest, central, and northeast Ohio. It has smooth scales. It is also more terrestrial than its cousin the rough greensnake. However, it does not hesitate to climb small shrubs, where it handles itself remarkably well. The smooth greensnake is very rare in southwest Ohio and has become increasingly rare throughout the state.

**RANGE**



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©TIM DANIEL  
INSET PHOTO BY: ©NINA HARFMANN

# VENOMOUS SNAKES

FAMILY VIPERIDAE

Ohio has only three species of venomous snakes, two of which have rattles at the end of the tail. The third species is the Northern copperhead. Many mistakenly believe the water moccasin occurs in Ohio. It ranges no farther north than the Dismal Swamp in southeastern Virginia in the eastern portion of its range, and extreme southern Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois, in the western part of its range. Water moccasins are not native to Ohio.

The heat sensitive pits in front of and below each eye of Ohio's three venomous snakes are capable of detecting extremely small increases in air temperature some distance from the snake's face. For that reason, one must exercise caution when climbing rocks or slopes in areas where venomous snakes occur.

An average of six people die of snakebites annually in the United States. Considerably more people are killed by dog bites and lightning.

Anyone bitten by a venomous snake will soon know it. Moderate symptoms will include mild swelling, discoloration, and pain at the wound site, and may also include general tingling, weakness, rapid pulse, dimness of vision, nausea, vomiting, and shortness of breath. Severe symptoms include rapid swelling and numbness, followed by severe pain at the wound site; there may also be pinpoint-size pupils, facial twitching, slurred speech, convulsions, paralysis, and loss of consciousness.

Begin first aid treatment by keeping the victim calm and immobile, preferably lying down. Immobilize the bitten limb at or below heart level.

Get the victim to a hospital immediately! Call the Poison Help hotline (1-800-222-1222) to find the nearest hospital capable of treating snake bites. Most people die of snakebite because they didn't seek medical help or delayed too long in going to the hospital.

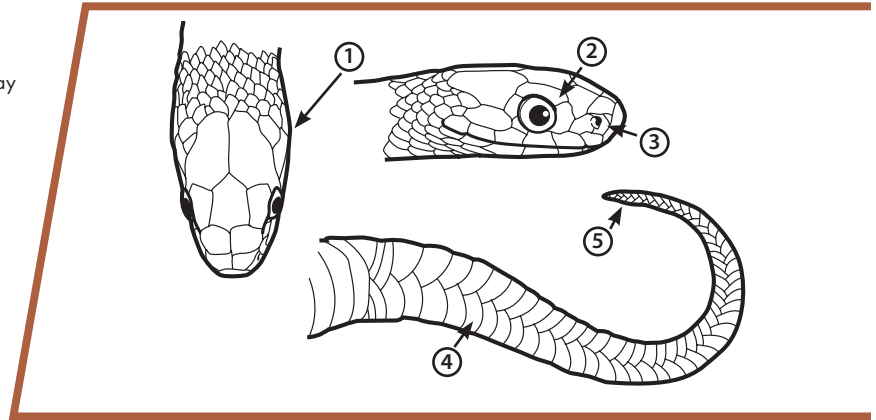
Prevention is the best method for dealing with snakebites. Learn how to distinguish venomous from nonvenomous snakes and learn where to find - and therefore how to avoid - the venomous ones. The following five characteristics can be checked to determine whether any snake found in Ohio is venomous.



MASSASAUGA  
PHOTO BY: ©GREG LIPPS

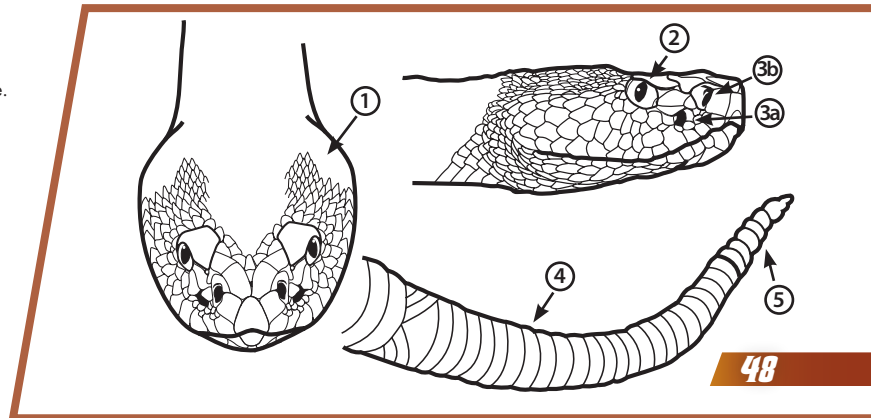
## ***NONVENOMOUS SNAKES***

1. Head usually oval when viewed from above, but may be somewhat triangular.
2. Pupils round.
3. No pits - only nostrils present.
4. Divided scales on underside of tail.
5. Although many snakes vibrate their tail when upset, nonvenomous snakes never have rattles.



## ***VENOMOUS SNAKES***

1. Head distinctly triangular, when viewed from above.
2. Pupils elliptical.
3. Pits (a) as well as nostrils (b) present.
4. Undivided scales on underside of tail.
5. Except for the Northern copperhead, tail ends in a rattle.





FAMILY VIPERIDAE

# EASTERN COPPERHEAD

STATUS: UNCOMMON

*Agkistrodon contortrix*

LENGTH: 24"–36"

**DESCRIPTION:** Copperheads have the dubious distinction of having bitten more people in the United States than any other venomous snake, yet fewer snakebite deaths are attributed to the copperhead. Because the amount of venom injected during a bite is not enough to seriously hurt a healthy adult, the bite is rarely fatal. However, it is extremely painful, and, like a honeybee sting, has the potential to produce a life-threatening allergic reaction. Their coloration not only serves as excellent camouflage, but also makes them one of Ohio's most beautiful reptiles. When encountered, copperheads are usually content to lie motionless or retreat if given the chance. But if aroused, they will vibrate their tail rapidly and strike wildly.

**HABITAT:** Copperheads are widely scattered throughout most of unglaciated Ohio. Although they occupy a variety of habitats from floodplains to ridge tops, they show a marked preference for the rocky, wooded hillsides of southeastern Ohio. They are not as averse to civilization as the timber rattlesnake, but copperheads tend to stay away from well-settled areas.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTOS BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN

# FAMILY VIPERIDAE *Massasauga*

FAMILY VIPERIDAE

STATUS: ENDANGERED

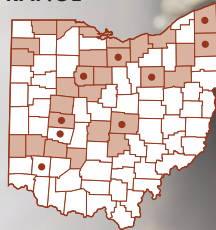
*Sistrurus catenatus*

LENGTH: 18"–24"

**DESCRIPTION:** "Swamp rattler" and "black snapper" are other names given to this small rattlesnake. The name massasauga is from the Chippewa Indian language and refers to the marshy areas associated with the mouth of a river. Massasaugas typically are very sluggish and make little or no attempt to bite unless thoroughly provoked. The bite is seldom, if ever, fatal to a healthy adult. Although the venom is highly toxic, a typical bite does not deliver large enough quantities to be lethal. This is still a venomous snake, however, and should be treated with utmost caution and respect. Its color varies from gray to brownish gray – and some specimens are almost entirely black. The stout-bodied massasauga can easily be identified by its small but conspicuous rattle.

**HABITAT:** Historically recorded in more than 30 Ohio counties, the secretive massasauga swamp rattlers are widely scattered and rarely seen. Originally, these rattlers probably inhabited all the scattered prairies of glaciated Ohio, but extensive farming has drastically reduced their numbers. Colonies still persist in bogs, swamps, and wet prairies within glaciated Ohio.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



Color variation shown

PHOTOS BY: ©GREG LIPPS

FAMILY VIPERIDAE      STATUS: ENDANGERED

# TIMBER RATTLESNAKE

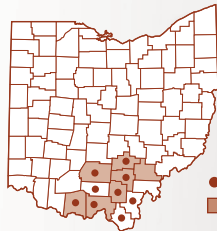
*Crotalus horridus*

LENGTH: 36"—60"

**DESCRIPTION:** By virtue of their large size, timber rattlesnakes are the most dangerous snakes in northeastern America. They may attain a length in excess of six feet, but average 40 inches in length. Fortunately, when encountered most timber rattlesnakes are mild in disposition unless aroused and make little attempt to rattle or strike. Most remain coiled or quickly crawl away if given the opportunity. Timber rattlesnakes have two basic color phases. The yellow phase has a series of dark brown or black chevron-shaped crossbands on a ground color of brownish yellow and a yellow or brown head. The black phase has the crossbands on a ground color of blackish brown and a black head. Contrary to popular belief, it is difficult to estimate the age of a rattlesnake by counting the number of rattles at the end of its tail. A new segment develops every time the skin is shed. Timber rattlesnakes usually shed eight times during their first four years and then usually shed once a year thereafter. In addition, old segments are occasionally lost.

**HABITAT:** Remnant colonies persist in widely scattered areas in southern unglaciated Ohio. They prefer dry, wooded hill country where they prey on a variety of small warm-blooded animals.

## RANGE



- 1976 to present
- Historic records prior to 1976



PHOTO BY: ©TIM DANIEL  
INSET PHOTO BY: ©ALVIN STAFFAN

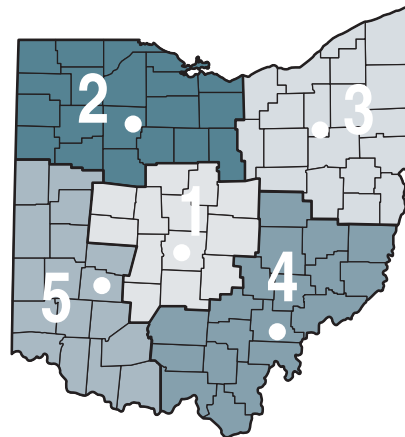
# LICENSING & REGULATIONS

Ohio Administrative Code (O.A.C.) Section 1501:31-25-04, regulates the possession, purchase, sale, or trade of reptiles and amphibians native to our state. The purpose of this regulation is to protect and conserve native reptiles and amphibians while maintaining the educational and economic benefits derived from them. A permit is required to possess any native Ohio reptile or amphibian. Contact your district wildlife office for further information.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration under Section 1240.62(b) of Title 21 CFR, Chapter 1, Subpart D, specifically prohibits the distribution of viable turtle eggs and/or live turtles with a carapace (shell) measuring less than four inches in length. This is an attempt to stem the spread of salmonella bacteria from turtles to children. After handling a reptile always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.



LAKE ERIE WATERSNAKE  
PHOTO BY: ©MICHIEL DEWIT



## DIVISION OFFICES

### WILDLIFE HEADQUARTERS

2045 Morse Road, Bldg. G  
Columbus, OH 43229-6693

☎ (614) 265-6300

☎ 1-800-WILDLIFE

☎ 1-800-750-0750  
(Ohio Relay TTY only)

### WILDLIFE DISTRICT ONE

1500 Dublin Road  
Columbus, OH 43215

☎ (614) 644-3925

### WILDLIFE DISTRICT TWO

952 Lima Avenue  
Findlay, OH 45840

☎ (419) 424-5000

### WILDLIFE DISTRICT THREE

912 Portage Lakes Drive  
Akron, OH 44319

☎ (330) 644-2293

### WILDLIFE DISTRICT FOUR

360 E. State Street  
Athens, OH 45701

☎ (740) 589-9930

### WILDLIFE DISTRICT FIVE

1076 Old Springfield Pike  
Xenia, OH 45385

☎ (937) 372-9261

# WISE WORDS FOR WILDLIFE EDUCATORS

Bringing wild animals into the classroom is a great way to connect students to the natural world. However, before bringing these animals into the classroom, it is important to understand that there are regulations and laws (Ohio Revised Code 1532.02 and 1533.08), as well as certain permits required for possessing any native wild animal in Ohio.

The Division of Wildlife offers Wild Animal Permits as a way for people to possess or study wild animals native to Ohio. A scientific collection permit is available for research, survey and inventory purposes. An education permit is available for static display of native wildlife or programming purposes. Applicants must be affiliated with an educational or scientific institution. These permits are issued by the Division of Wildlife Law Enforcement Section's permit coordinator. Please note that reptiles taken from the wild may not be returned after 30 days of

possession and those held in captivity must be PIT tagged once they are a certain size or prior to transferring them to another permit holder. You must also keep track of dates of possession and relinquishment, where the animal was taken from and, if not returned to the wild, the date of death or name of person to whom the animal was given. Additional written permission from the chief is required if you wish to take possession of any state-listed endangered or aquatic nuisance species.

Personal possession of native reptiles may be permitted through a noncommercial propagating license. Only "collectible" species of reptiles and amphibians may be taken from the wild with the exception of snapping and softshell turtles which can be harvested with a fishing license. All other species may only be acquired from a propagated source.



For further information on this please contact the  
Division of Wildlife's Permit Office at  
1-800-WILDLIFE.

MIDLAND PAINTED TURTLE  
PHOTO BY: ©TIM DANIEL

# REFERENCES

## RECOMMENDED READING

***Peterson Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America***, 4th edition, by Robert Powell, Roger Conant and Joseph T. Collins. Peterson Field Guide, Houghton Mifflin Hartcourt Publishing Company, 2016.

***Snakes of the United States and Canada***, by Carl H. Ernst and Evelyn M. Ernst. Smithsonian, 2003.

***Turtles of the United States and Canada***, 2nd Edition, by Carl H. Ernst and Jeffrey E. Lovich. The John Hopkins University Press, 2009.

***Ohio Turtle, Lizard, and Snake Atlas***, by Douglas E. Wynn and Scott M. Moody. Ohio Biological Survey, 2006.

***Smithsonian Answer Book: Snakes***, by George Zug and Carl Ernst. Smithsonian, 2004.

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COMMON WALL LIZARD  
PHOTO BY: ©SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



For more information about Ohio's native wildlife, please contact the Division of Wildlife:  
**1-800-WILDLIFE**  
 (1-800-750-0750 Ohio Relay TTY only)

**WILDOHIO.GOV**

If you enjoy this book, mail a donation to:

Wildlife Diversity Fund  
 2045 Morse Road, Bldg G.  
 Columbus, OH 43229-6693

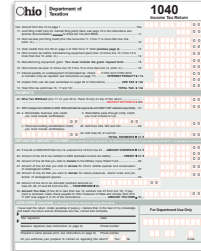
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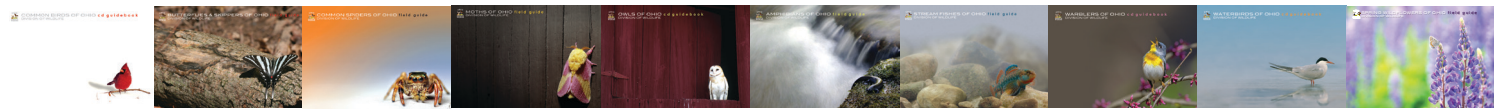
**To purchase a Legacy Stamp:**  
 Call the Division of Wildlife:  
**1-800-WILDLIFE** or visit **WILDOHIO.GOV**



**To make a donation:**  
 Go to the second page of the 1040 income tax form for the tax checkoff program



**To purchase a license plate:**  
 Visit your local registrar's office or call the BMV at **1-888-PLATES3**



## OTHER DIVISION OF WILDLIFE FUNDED BOOKLETS

- Pub 5127 - Stream Fishes of Ohio
- Pub 5140 - Common Spiders of Ohio
- Pub 5204 - Butterflies & Skippers of Ohio
- Pub 5320 - Dragonflies & Damselflies of Ohio
- Pub 5334 - Sport Fish of Ohio
- Pub 5344 - Mammals of Ohio

- Pub 5348 - Amphibians of Ohio
- Pub 5349 - Warblers of Ohio
- Pub 5354 - Reptiles of Ohio
- Pub 5414 - Common Birds of Ohio
- Pub 5418 - Waterbirds of Ohio
- Pub 5423 - Owls of Ohio

- Pub 5467 - Moths of Ohio
- Pub 5473 - Lichens of Ohio
- Pub 5488 - Common Bees & Wasps of Ohio
- Pub 5494 - Wildflowers of Ohio
- Pub 5494 - Raptors of Ohio



# DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES



The ODNR Division of Wildlife is the state agency responsible for managing Ohio's fish and wildlife resources. The primary source of funding for the division comes from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, federal excise taxes on hunting, fishing, and shooting equipment, and donations from the public. We care about all wildlife and maintaining stable, healthy wildlife populations. Our challenge is to balance the needs of wildlife, habitat, and people.

To conserve and improve fish and wildlife resources and their habitats for sustainable use and appreciation by all.

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