Evicted through habitat loss—or killed outright—threatened and endangered reptiles also fall prey to greedy collectors.

Illinois' Disappearing Reptiles

Alligator snapping turtle (*Macrochelys temminckii*)

(Photo courtesy David Olson.)

Illinois is home to 63 species of native reptiles, and nearly one-third are in jeopardy. Five of the 17 turtle species and 11 of the 39 snake species are either state-endangered or state-threatened, and an additional three species have some federal protection (exportation from the United States of both species of box turtles is prohibited without a special permit and the copperbelly water snake is proactively protected in southeastern Illinois because of an agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service).

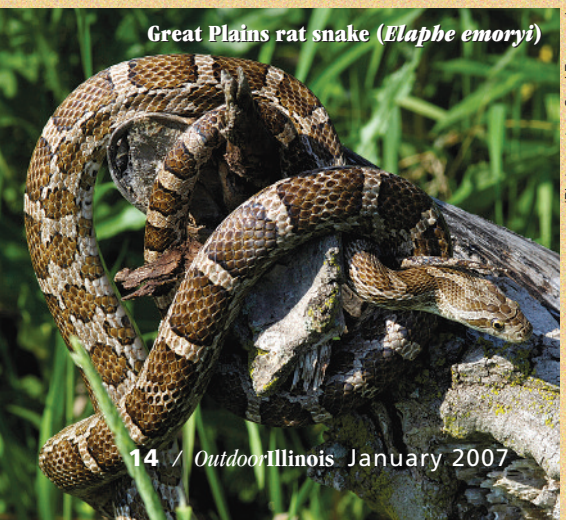
Many state-listed reptiles are at the edge of their geographic range and exist only in a handful of Illinois counties. Others once were more widespread, but their numbers have drastically declined through development/alteration of their habitat or outright killing. Additional pressures put on these already rare reptiles include illegal collecting and commercialization in the pet trade.

Usually the best tool to protect these vanishing resources is protection of the animal and its critical habitat. Captive breeding programs have not yet been instrumental in saving any of Illinois' endangered or threatened reptiles. Any attempt to restore a species through reintroduction must be carefully evaluated to assure the best possible match between the animal and available habitat. Development of a formal recovery plan for a species is one way to make certain that all important factors have been considered before reintroduction is undertaken.

—**Scott Ballard** District Natural Heritage Biologist, DNR Division of Natural Heritage, Marion

Eastern massasauga rattlesnake (*Sistrurus catenatus*)

(Photo courtesy Scott Ballard.)


Great Plains rat snake (*Elaphe emoryi*)

(Photo courtesy Carol Freeman.)

Illinois' endangered and threatened reptile species:

- alligator snapping turtle (*Macrochelys temminckii*) - SE
- spotted turtle (*Clemmys guttata*) - SE
- Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) - ST
- river cooter (*Pseudemys concinna*) - SE
- Illinois mud turtle (*Kinosternon flavescens*) - SE
- Kirtland's snake (*Clonophis kirtlandii*) - ST
- Great Plains rat snake (*Elaphe emoryi*) - SE
- western hognose snake (*Heterodon nasicus*) - ST
- coachwhip snake (*Masticophis flagellum*) - SE
- Mississippi green water snake (*Nerodia cyclopion*) - ST
- broad-banded water snake (*Nerodia fasciata*) - SE
- flathead snake (*Tantilla gracilis*) - ST
- eastern ribbon snake (*Thamnophis sauritus*) - ST
- lined snake (*Tropidoclonion lineatum*) - ST
- eastern massasauga rattlesnake (*Sistrurus catenatus*) - SE
- timber rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*) - ST