



**NORTHERN  
And  
SOUTHERN  
COPPERHEAD**



**TIMBER  
RATTLESNAKE**



**COTTONMOUTH  
WATER  
MOCCASIN**



**EASTERN  
MASSASAUGA  
RATTLESNAKE**

## SNAKES AND THE LAW IN ILLINOIS

If you wish to do research on or keep snakes as pets in Illinois, there are some regulations you should be aware of:

- (1) Permits are required to study, work with, or maintain venomous snakes.
- (2) There are captive maintenance regulations for any boa, python, or anaconda.
- (3) Permits are required to study, work with, or maintain endangered/threatened species.
- (4) Permits are required to work with, or collect snakes from public lands such as a state park, nature preserve, or national forest.
- (5) There are personal possession limits for any native species of snake.
- (6) It is illegal to buy, sell, trade, barter, or breed any wild-caught Illinois snakes, any resulting offspring from them, or any lineage of Illinois origin.

The full list of regulations regarding the legalities of snakes or any other reptile or amphibian can be found at the following links for the Illinois Herp Code:

Herp Code Statute--  
<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs5.asp?ActID=3563&ChapterID=41>

Herp Code Ad Rules--  
<https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/adrules/documents/17-885.pdf>



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## SNAKES OF ILLINOIS



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Illinois is home to 40 species of snakes. Only 4 of the 40 species are venomous. 11 of the 40 species are listed as endangered or threatened. Snakes are probably some of the most feared creatures in the animal kingdom. Many of these fears come from misinformation or a lack of information.

Snakes and other reptiles are poikilothermic (cold-blooded). This means their body temperature is the same temperature as their surroundings. Their bodies are covered with scales. Even though they may be cold to the touch, snakes are not slimy. Snakes do not have eyelids or ears, so they cannot blink or hear, although they can feel vibrations in the ground through their belly. The tongue of a snake cannot sting you. It is used to detect odors in the air and to locate prey.

Snakes are very beneficial in keeping rodents and some insect pests under control. In a study done on western rattlesnakes, it was found that an average-sized snake could eat 9 pounds of rodents each year !!

Because a snake's outer skin does not grow with the snake, it becomes necessary to shed it periodically. On the average, a snake will shed 2-4 times a year, depending on how much food is eaten.

During the winter months, snakes hibernate below the frostline in the ground, living off the fat stored from eating during the warmer months. In springtime, snakes emerge from hibernation to find mates and breed. Egg-laying species lay eggs in the summer, and the young hatch in the fall. Live-bearing species also give birth to young in the fall. Since snakes do not show any maternal care, the young must fend for themselves.

Most snakes are not aggressive towards humans. They will, however, vibrate their tail and flatten their head when cornered to give the appearance of being venomous. This behavior saves many of them from larger predators that are fooled. Snakes, like other wild animals, may bite if threatened.

Overcoming fears and prejudices about these misunderstood creatures is a first step in learning how beneficial they are. Allowing them to co-exist with man benefits us all.

## STATE ENDANGERED/THREATENED SNAKES

Great Plains Rat Snake  
Eastern Coachwhip  
Broad-banded Water Snake  
Eastern Massasauga  
Kirtland's Snake  
Timber Rattlesnake  
Western Hognose Snake  
Mississippi Green Water Snake  
Flathead Snake  
Eastern Ribbon Snake  
Lined Snake

Current studies and evaluations may very well add more species to the list in the near future. Reptile conservation and habitat preservation is crucial so that we do not lose these very important native inhabitants.

## ILLINOIS' VENOMOUS SNAKES

The four species of venomous snakes in Illinois are the Copperhead, Cottonmouth Water Moccasin, Timber Rattlesnake, and Eastern Massasauga. Three characteristics they share are:

- (1) an elliptical cat-like pupil;
- (2) a heat-sensing pit on each side of the head in between the eye and nostril;
- (3) a single row of scales on the underside of the tail.

When in venomous snake country, watch where you walk. Bites in the field most often occur when a venomous snake is picked up, stepped on, or cornered. Most snakebites in the United States involve people working with them in captivity. Of those bitten in the U.S., less than 1/10 of one percent die. More people are killed each year by bee stings and being struck by lightning. If you encounter a venomous snake in the wild, just LEAVE IT ALONE. The venomous snakes in Illinois are not aggressive, and will not come after you.

Most venomous snakes in Illinois occur in the southern one-third of the state. The two rattlesnakes are on the endangered/threatened species list. The cottonmouth water moccasin occurs in extreme southern Illinois.

## SNAKE CONTROL

Even though snakes are very effective at keeping rodents and some insect pests under control, and aren't aggressive towards humans, it can still be startling to come upon one unexpectedly in the field or your yard.

If you would rather not be surprised some day by a snake in your garden or yard, there are three things you can do to minimize the chances of that happening:

(1) Keep your lawn mowed regularly;  
Tall grass can be good habitat for snakes.

(2) Keep woodpiles off the ground;  
These make good nesting sites for rodents, which in turn attract snakes.

(3) Keep the area around your house free of trash piles and rubbish; Mice, again, are attracted to these potential nesting sites, which in turn will attract snakes.

Keep in mind that even though you follow these steps, you may still get an occasional snake "just passing through". Don't be so quick to kill it. Give the snake 10-15 minutes, and it will be out of your way. If it is present, it is hunting harmful rodent pests.

There are no real effective snake repellants. Pouring ammonia around your residence or spreading mothballs have been recommendations that just don't work. Since snakes utilize a different method of smelling than we do, these noxious odors don't seem to affect them. The best way to keep snakes away from your home is to remove their habitat and food source.

## CHECKLIST OF SNAKES OCCURRING IN ILLINOIS

Midwestern Worm Snake (*Carphophis amoenus*)  
Western Worm Snake (*Carphophis vermis*)  
Northern Scarlet Snake (*Cemophora coccinea*)  
Kirtland's Snake (*Clonophis kirtlandii*)  
Blue/Black Racer (*Coluber constrictor* ssp.)  
Ringneck Snake (*Diadophis punctatus* ssp.)  
Western Mud Snake (*Farancia abacura*)  
Western Hognose Snake (*Heterodon nasicus* ssp.)  
Eastern Hognose Snake (*Heterodon platirhinos*)  
Prairie Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis calligaster*)  
Speckled/Black Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getula* ssp.)  
Eastern/Red Milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum* ssp.)  
Eastern Coachwhip (*Masticophis flagellum*)  
Mississippi Green Water Snake (*Nerodia cyclopion*)  
Plain-bellied Water Snake (*Nerodia erythrogaster* ssp.)  
Southern/Broad-banded Water Snake (*Nerodia fasciata*)  
Diamond-backed Water Snake (*Nerodia rhombifer*)  
Northern/Midland Water Snake (*Nerodia sipedon* ssp.)  
Rough Green Snake (*Opheodrys aestivus*)  
Smooth Green Snake (*Opheodrys vernalis*)  
Great Plains Rat Snake (*Pantherophis emoryi*)  
Black/Gray Rat Snake (*Pantherophis obsoletus* ssp.)  
Western Fox Snake (*Pantherophis ramspotti*)  
Eastern Fox Snake (*Pantherophis vulpinus*)  
Bullsnake (*Pituophis catenifer*)  
Graham's Crayfish Snake (*Regina grahamii*)  
Queen Snake (*Regina septemvittata*)  
Midland Brown Snake (*Storeria dekayii*)  
Northern Red-bellied Snake (*Storeria occipitomaculata*)  
Flathead Snake (*Tantilla gracilis*)  
Western Ribbon Snake (*Thamnophis proximus*)  
Plains Garter Snake (*Thamnophis radix*)  
Eastern Ribbon Snake (*Thamnophis sauritus*)  
Eastern/Chicago Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis* ssp.)  
Lined Snake (*Tropidoclonion lineatum*)  
Western Smooth Earth Snake (*Virginia valeriae*)  
Northern/Southern Copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix* ssp.)  
Western Cottonmouth (*Agkistrodon piscivorus*)  
Timber Rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*)  
Eastern Massasauga (*Sistrurus catenatus*)