

Saving Milksnake:

What you can do to help

The Milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum*) is a long, narrow snake that varies in colour. It is tan, brown, or grey with many black-bordered 'saddle' shaped blotches on its back that are brown, copper, or red. These saddles alternate with smaller blotches on the sides. The belly is whitish with a black checkerboard pattern, but some hatchlings have a plain white belly. Milksnakes often have a distinct Y or V shaped mark on the back of the head. The scales of the Milksnake are not keeled (smooth to the touch).

Do you live near Milksnakes?

The Milksnake can be found throughout much of the Carolinian zone, where good habitat remains. Most of the year they live in a variety of habitats from prairies, pastures, and hayfields, to rocky hillsides and a wide variety of forest types. They spend time in and around buildings, like old barns, where they feed on mice. They always need to be close to water and sunlit cover objects where they can bask.

During the summer adult females lay their eggs in compost or manure piles, stumps, under boards, and in loose soil. Sometimes several females will lay their eggs in the same place.

In the winter they hibernate underground, in rotting logs, mammal burrows or in the foundations of old buildings.

What you can do to help

- ✓ Keep your property as natural as possible. Maintain or create brush piles and leave logs to decay where they lie. This is good for snakes and their food sources.
- ✓ Do not remove or change the position of rocks on your property, and create new rock piles if possible.
- ✓ Provide additional thermoregulation and birthing habitat by laying out cover materials throughout the property.
- ✓ Watch for snakes on the road from May–October every year and avoid running them over—and please help spread the word!



Photo: Scott Gillingwater

Field check

The Milksnake may be confused with other blotched snakes. Differences to look for are:

- ✓ Distinct Y or V shaped mark on the back of the head
- ✓ Smooth scales unlike all other local blotched snakes
- ✓ Distinct black outline around the saddles and blotches
- ✓ Long and narrow body unlike the thick-bodied Eastern Hog-nosed Snake

Did you know?

The name Milksnake comes from an old belief that these snakes entered barns at night to drink milk from cows. Milksnakes actually eat small mammals, birds and other snakes.

- ✓ Provide a 30m undisturbed area around known hibernation sites.
- ✓ Construct hibernacula if hibernation sites are lacking.
- ✓ When cutting trees leave stumps in place or even dislodge them slightly to provide access to the root system.
- ✓ Protect, maintain and restore south-facing rocky slopes adjacent to small forest openings or wetlands.

General Best Stewardship Practices

- ✓ **Keep domestic pets on a leash** when outside to prevent them from harming or harassing native wildlife.
- ✓ **Learn to identify invasive species.** Your local Conservation Authority or Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources Office can provide you with information on invasive species that occur in your area and what you can do to help prevent their spread.
- ✓ **Learn about stewardship activities** in your area and actively participate in protecting Species at Risk. To find more information about stewardship activities in your area, contact your local Stewardship Council or Conservation Authority.
- ✓ **Take advantage of the Environmental Farm Plan program.** To learn more contact the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources or the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.
- ✓ **If you have Species at Risk** on your property, you may be eligible for stewardship programs or financial incentives that support the protection and recovery of Species at Risk and their habitats. Contact the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources for more information.
- ✓ **Report any illegal activity** related to plants and wildlife to 1-877-TIPS-MNR (847-7667)

Did you know?

When threatened, the Milksnake vibrates its tail. If the snake is in dry vegetation the tail will make a buzzing or rattling sound when it hits the dry vegetation, making its predator, and people, think it is a rattlesnake.

Status

The Milksnake is listed as Special Concern nationally and provincially.

Carolinian Canada Coalition is working with local Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources Offices, Conservation Authorities and other Non-Governmental Organizations to recover Species at Risk.

You can help the recovery efforts by protecting this species and its habitat.

Good sources of information

Carolinian Canada Coalition:

www.carolinian.org

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources:

Includes information about Ontario Species at Risk
www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/

Natural Heritage Information Centre

<http://nhic.mnr.gov.on.ca/>

Find your local Conservation Authority Office:

www.conservationontario.ca

Government of Canada Species at Risk Public Registry:

www.sararegistry.gc.ca

Find your local Stewardship Council:

www.ontariostewardship.org

Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association

Includes information about the Environmental Farm Plan
ontariosoilcrop.org

Toronto Zoo Adopt-a-Pond

Learn more about Ontario's reptiles, their habitat and related conservation initiatives.
www.torontozoo.com/Adoptapond

Ontario's Reptile and Amphibian Atlas

See how you can participate and learn more about Ontario's reptiles and amphibians.
www.ontarionature.org/protect/species/herpetofauna_l_atlas.php