

EASTERN MILKSNAKE

Lampropeltis triangulum



Physical characteristics



This non-venomous snake is tan, brown, or grey in colour, with large red or brown dorsal blotches outlined in black that fade as the snake ages. Adults generally measure between 60 and 90 cm in length, but can grow up to 132 cm.

Diet



Juveniles feed on earthworms, other snake species, amphibians, and invertebrates. Adults feed mainly on small rodents, but also eat birds and bird eggs, reptiles, fish, amphibians, and invertebrates.

Habitat



The eastern milksnake uses farm buildings, stones, and other debris for shelter, thermoregulation, and feeding. It hibernates in underground hibernacula protected from frost (e.g., crevices, embankments, or old foundations). Hibernation is critical to its survival.



Periods of vulnerability



- The nesting season lasts from late May to early June.
- Eastern milksnakes lay 8 to 16 eggs in a variety of substrates, including rotting logs and stumps, piles of manure, leaf mounds, sawdust piles, compost, sand, and mammal burrows. The incubation period varies from 50 to 70 days.



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Threats



- Human-caused hazards: habitat loss and fragmentation, road mortality, extermination, riverbank modification, and wetland drainage.
- Predators, including raccoons, coyotes, foxes, skunks, and birds of prey.



Sustainable practices



- Protect natural habitat corridors.
- When mowing fields, start in the area farthest away from forest edges, riverbanks, and old farm buildings.
- Reduce the speed of farm machinery to give snakes time to leave the area.
- Raise the height of forage cuts to prevent snakes from being struck by farm machinery.
- Promote habitat creation by leaving low stone walls in place or piling rocks at the edges of fields.
 - Old farm buildings can also provide shelter for milksnakes.
 - Protect the area around hibernacula (if possible, an area of 100 m by 100 m) when this species is spotted.
- Do not hunt or kill eastern milksnakes:
 - They are non-venomous and hunt pests such as rodents. They are a beneficial species.

- As of 2023, species of **special concern** listed on Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*
- Management plan: www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/virtual_sara/files/plans/mp_milksnake_e_proposed.pdf

Sources

Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). (2002). "Eastern milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum*): COSEWIC assessment and status report 2014." www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/species-risk-public-registry/cosewic-assessments-status-reports/eastern-milksnake-2014.html

Environment Canada. (2014). *Management Plan for the Milksnake (Lampropeltis triangulum) in Canada* [Proposal]. www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/virtual_sara/files/plans/mp_milksnake_e_proposed.pdf

St. Lawrence Valley Natural History Society (SLVNHS). (2015). *Guide de conservation des amphibiens, des reptiles et de leurs habitats en milieu agricole*. oag.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/SHNVSL_Guide-amphibiens-reptiles-milieu-agricole_lowres_v2.pdf

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