

THE MONITOR



NEWSLETTER OF THE HOOSIER HERPETOLOGICAL SOCIETY

A non-profit organization dedicated to the education of its membership
and the conservation of all amphibians and reptiles.

Volume 31 Number 5

May 2020

HHS Meetings

Our next meeting has been cancelled. We still aren't sure when Indy Parks will give the OK on meetings and activities or when it will be safe to return. Please check our social media and website for updated information. We're sorry for the inconvenience.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Thank you and welcome to the Hoosier Herpetological Society!

Thank you to our returning members!

Without all of you, we wouldn't be the organization that we've grown to be today!

RENEWAL MEMBERS

Katherine Bottles
Mary Hylton
Anastasia Marsh
Brenten Reust
Jeff Wines

NEW MEMBERS

Aaron Barrick
Scott Johnson
Brittany Kilborn

Don't forget to visit the HHS on Social Media!



Black snakes of Indiana

Article and photos by Jim Horton

I often get ID requests, hear stories, or have read accounts on social media of someone encountering large *black snakes*. Many refer to them as just a *black snake*. The species in question can usually be identified by its movements, field markings, or location.

Indiana is home to 3 species of black snakes. They aren't completely black. Some have a faint pattern and all three have some degree of contrast or color on the head. The ventral side of all three is not solid black either.

All of our native black colored snakes exhibit pattern as young or juveniles.

All three have a common name starting with the word "black", (Black rat snake, black racer, and black kingsnake). So its easy to figure out where the common term "black snake" came from. Using this single term to identify a snake that is dark or black, could easily confuse those not familiar with our Indiana species.

All three of our "black" snakes are medium to large species as adults. All can climb but one is exceptional arboreal – black rat snake. I've found that this is most referred to as the *black snake*.



Black rat snake (*Pantherophis spiloides*)

Many people might see them basking high in a tree, in an outbuilding, or on a hiking trail. They are often found stretched out on rural roadways with its body in a kinked position. This is said to break up the "snake" pattern to deter predators.



Black rat snake in "kinked" position

This snake is an excellent climber. It can scale the most vertical surface with ease. Here, it is usually in search of birds, and, or, bird eggs. It also readily feeds on rodents.

Strong patterns are evident in this species as youngsters but it fades as they mature. Some are almost black with faint saddling pattern but most others retain some pattern even in adulthood.

Black rat snakes, or what is now technically referred to as the Eastern grey rat snake (*Pantherophis spiloides*) – still a black rat to me, is one of the largest species in our state. It may reach over six feet in length. *Pantherophis a.* occurs almost state-wide and is absent in the northwest sand prairie region in Indiana.

Probably the second most encountered snake would be the black racer (*Coluber constrictor*), or, up north, the blue racer (*Coluber c. foxii*). This one grows large, too. It may grow to six feet but averages in the 4 to 5 foot range. Don't let the species name fool you. Racers are not constrictors.

The young have strong patterning but it fades entirely to a slate or jet black as they grow. Adults have a light grey or bluish belly and a white chin.



Black racer (*Coluber constrictor*)

Racers, as the name states, are fast movers. You'll often see them zipping across country or woodland roads. It's a terrestrial snake but I've seen them climb up into trees. This is the snake that is known to chase people. I don't really see that because I'm usually chasing them. These diurnal snakes have large eyes and are almost always aware of their surroundings. This species will stand its ground if cornered. Fiercely striking and shaking its tail, the racer "black snake" does a fine job of defending itself. Don't try to pick one up. You're most likely to be bitten, and musked profusely. Racers are known to eat a wide variety of prey including other snakes. Even venomous species are on the menu. Racers occur all across the Hoosier state.

Finally, the southern blend of *black snake*. The black king snake (*Lampropeltis getula*) is now known as the eastern king snake. This is the smallest of the three. It typically grows to the 3 and 4 foot range but the record for North America is 82 inches! Is that a misprint? Taken right out of my (not so favorite 4th edition of the Peterson Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians).



Black kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getula*)

It is most common in the southern third of the state. The range extends up past Vigo County with a single record in Tippecanoe County. These don't differ too much from young to adult in pattern and color. Hatchlings have light chainlike narrow yellow crossbands on the dorsum and sides. This pattern will fade as they grow. The ventral side of this snake is gorgeous. It is typically a stark black and white checkering. Kings are decent climbers but are usually found at ground level. This is a powerful snake that dines on a wide variety of prey items. Rodents, lizards, birds,

eggs, but snakes are a favorite. Black kings are well known for overpowering and consuming even larger snakes. Another fact is that they often eat venomous species. King snakes have a natural immunity to the venom of North American pit vipers. Copperheads and timber rattlesnakes are fair game for the constricting king snake.

There are other species native to Indiana that aren't typically black in color but variations do occur. Examples include: Eastern hognose (*Heterodon platirhinos*), Eastern Massasauga (*Sistrurus c. cantenatus*), northern watersnake (*Nerodia sipedon*).



Northern water snake (*Nerodia sipedon*)

I encounter black or near black eastern hognoses often in our state. A black phase of the eastern massasauga has been documented in our state. Northern water snakes tend to appear darker in the northern section of Indiana. I've seen almost black versions in central Indiana as well.

Another exception is the copperbelly water snake (*Nerodia erythrogaster neglecta*). This species isn't always completely black but quite dark in color. Young are strongly patterned orange with dark blotches but it disappears with age. Adults are dark gray, dark brown or almost black. It has a beautiful red/orange belly. The State Endangered copperbelly is often confused with the venomous cottonmouth.

The cottonmouth is also a species that is typically dark to almost black as adults. Cottonmouths are designated as an Indiana species and listed as Indiana Endangered but it hasn't been documented in our state in more than a decade.

References: Amphibians and Reptiles of Indiana, Sherman Minton Jr. - 2001
Peterson Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America - 2016

No Herpout – No Problem

Text and photos by Kimberly Scott

This weekend would have been the "Herpout". A weekend filled with Camping and field herping (looking for reptiles and amphibians) with the Hoosier Herpetological society.

The Coronavirus cancelled the event, although the weather last night wouldn't be suitable for camping anyway. In fact, I was so bummed out I almost didn't go out this morning, but my husband David persuaded me to get outside and do what I love.

We didn't expect to see anything. To be honest, we were just going to hike, but it turned out to be a very fruitful day! We found so many different species! In the photos are a black racer, eastern milk snake, an eastern box turtle, American toad, slimy salamander, an eastern hognose (playing dead), cricket frog. Others found (not pictured) northern copperheads, Dekay's brown snake, redback salamanders and more.



President's message

Jim Horton

Well, our meeting place has been cancelled to all activities until further notice. Please check our website, Facebook and Instagram pages for updated information. If Indy Parks isn't open for meetings or activities, then we won't be meeting. I hope we will be able to hold our June meeting.

If facilities are still closed, we may try another avenue. We are trying our best to provide you with a guest speaker. We may possibly hold a facebook live meeting or something similar. Again, please check into social media, the website, or contact me if you aren't sure of a meeting possibility.

The cool weather has put a damper on getting outdoors for some. Our annual Herpout was cancelled but some of our members were able to get out anyway. See Kimberly Scott's report on what they found in this issue.

The Indiana Forest Alliance is looking for volunteers to help with surveying herps. They are holding an EcoBlitz in Hoosier National Forest this summer. I don't have dates yet. If you are interested in helping, please contact me.

Salazar's pit viper, a new green pit viper from India

Source – Sciencedaily.com and Pensoft Publishers

April 21, 2020

A new green pit viper species of the genus *Trimeresurus* was discovered during the herpetological expedition to Arunachal Pradesh in India, part of the Himalayan biodiversity hotspot. The scientists named the newly-discovered snake *Trimeresurus salazar* after a Parselmouth (able to talk with serpents) wizard, co-founder of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and the founder of the House of Slytherin -- Salazar Slytherin, the fictional character of J.K. Rowling's saga "Harry Potter." The discovery, authored by Zeeshan Mirza of the National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru, Mr. Harshal and Mr. Mandar of the Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai, Mr. Gowande of Pune's Fergusson College and Mr. Phansalkar of the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, is published in the open-access journal *Zoosystematics and Evolution*.

The pit vipers in the genus *Trimeresurus* are charismatic venomous serpents, distributed widely across east and southeast Asia. In total, the genus includes at least 48 species, with fifteen representatives occurring in India. The species belonging to the genus are morphologically cryptic, which makes it difficult to distinguish them in the field. As a result, their real diversity could be underestimated.

Arunachal Pradesh, where the new species was found, belongs to the Himalayan biodiversity hotspot, which explains the diverse flora and fauna being continuously discovered there.

The new green pit viper demonstrates a unique orange to reddish stripe, present on the head and body in males.

Explaining the name of the new species, the scientists suggest that it is colloquially referred to as the Salazar's pit viper.

This is already the second species discovered within the course of the expedition to Arunachal Pradesh, which reflects the poor nature of biodiversity documentation across north-eastern India.

"Future dedicated surveys conducted across northeastern India will help document biodiversity, which is under threat from numerous development activities that include road widening, agriculture, and hydro-electric projects," shares the lead researcher Dr. Zeeshan A. Mirza from National Centre for Biological Science of Bangalore, India.



2020 HERPETOLOGICAL EVENTS

ALL DATES SUBJECT TO CHANGE OR CANCEL DUE TO THE COVID19 VIRUS SITUATION

May 31, 2020 - Midwest Reptile Show, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Harvest Pavilion, Indiana State Fairgrounds, Indianapolis. \$5.00 admission, reptiles, amphibians, books, cages, feeder animals, and other supplies. Sell your herps and dry goods free of charge at our H.H.S. information booth (HHS members only)
www.midwestreptile.com Other dates – July 12, August 30

July 18, 2020 – Snake Fest, exhibits, live animals, presentations from a variety of organizations. Brown County State Park, Nashville, IN

August 1, 2020 – HHS live herpetological display/presentations at Greenwood Nature Center.

October 3, 2020 – HHS live herpetological exhibit at Eagle Library, 1-4PM

HAND HELD HERPS-ARIZONA 2019

Story and photos by Roger Carter

Arizona has three subspecies of The Glossy snake, *Arizona elegans*, which measure thirty to fifty inches long as adults. The Painted desert glossy snake, *Arizona elegans philipi*, which is found in the upper northeast corner of Arizona, the Desert glossy snake, *Arizona elegans eburnata*, which is found at the western edge of Arizona and the Arizona Glossy snake, *Arizona elegans noctivaga*, (this is the one that we saw) which is found in the southeast corner of Arizona into the central part of the state. The background color is light with darker blotches that have a darker outline, the ventral surface is a lighter color. The scales are smooth. Found in deserts and other open areas. This is a constrictor that eats snakes, lizards and small mammals.

This is a small snake that we found while we were road cruising at night on a paved road somewhere near Portal, Arizona. This was another snake that did not try to bite or even musk on us.



Board meetings

All meetings are currently on hold until further notice.

HHS board meetings are held every 2nd Wednesday of the month at Eagle Library.

All members are welcome to attend. In fact, we'd love to hear your suggestions, comments, or concerns.

www.hoosierherpsoc.org

HHS Board of Directors - 2020

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The Hoosier Herpetological Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to the education of its membership and the conservation of all reptiles and amphibians. General monthly meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. at Holliday Park Nature Center. Membership is open to all interested individuals. **No venomous animals are allowed at the General Meetings.**

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Don't forget to check out the HHS on Social Media!



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MEMBERSHIP FORM

☐ New Member

☐ Renewal

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☐ Individual/Family Membership \$20.00

☐ Sustaining Membership \$25.00 or more

Herpetological Interest(s) _____

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