



Eastern Milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum triangulum*) – The Rattlesnake that Wasn't



Did you know?

- The Eastern Milksnake is one of six species of kingsnake found in North America and is actually a constrictor, meaning it wraps around its prey before it feeds.
- The Eastern Milksnake got its name because it was once mistakenly thought to milk cows.
- Although the average life span of an Eastern Milksnake is around 7 years, some have been known to live for more than 20 years.

Habitat: Open forest, forest edges, meadows and cultivated areas

Weight: 400-750 grams

Length: 60-90cm

Diet: Rodents, Frogs, Birds, Small Snakes

Status: Special Concern in Ontario and Canada

Identification: The Eastern Milksnake has a greyish coloured background with distinct reddish brown blotches that are outlined in black (no other snake species in Ontario has reddish blotches). The Eastern Milksnake has a light coloured V or Y shaped mark on its head.





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Range: The Eastern Milksnake can be found throughout the Great Lakes region and occurs in Ontario as far north as Lake Nipissing and Sault Ste. Marie.



Interesting Facts:

- **The Eastern Milksnake seems to enjoy rural areas with an abundance of barns, sheds and older houses. It is often found under objects that receive direct sunlight such as large planks, debris, rock piles or rubbish; using the heat from these objects to thermoregulate (control its body temperature).**
- **When confronted with danger the Eastern Milksnake will vibrate its tail against dry leaves on the ground, which can sound startlingly similar to a Rattlesnake.**

Threats to the Eastern Milksnake

The Eastern Milksnake is currently considered to be a Species at Risk in Ontario; being classified as "Special Concern" by the Ministry of Natural Resources, meaning that its populations are sensitive to human activities or natural events. The five major reasons for this are: Habitat loss due to urbanization, intensive land use practices such as forestry and agriculture, persecution by people, predation by feral and domestic dogs and cats and mortality on roads.



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Historically the Eastern Milksnake was mistakenly thought to steal milk from cows, which led to many being killed by farmers. In reality the Milksnake is beneficial to farmers because it keeps rodent populations in check, and away from stored grain. Currently however the major cause of human persecution of the Eastern Milksnake is that it resembles the venomous Rattlesnake, both in appearance with its blotchy pattern and in the way that it vibrates its tail when threatened.



Eastern Milksnakes and the Bruce Trail:

The Bruce Trail Conservancy (BTC) is continually preserving land and habitat that is vital for the Eastern Milksnake. Our staff ecologists are always keeping an eye out for this species and keep detailed records of where they are spotted. When suitable snake habitat is found on BTC managed land it is preserved to encourage local snake populations to thrive.

What can you do?

If you spot an Eastern Milksnake on the Bruce Trail let us know! Send any pictures you take of it to the BTC. But remember to be very cautious and to never disturb or get too close to it; not only is the Eastern Milksnake a Species at Risk that is protected by the Provincial and Federal governments, it could also be confused with other more dangerous snakes, namely the Massasauga Rattlesnake.

You can also report your sighting at the Ontario Herpetofaunal Atlas at this link:

www.ontarionature.org/protect/species/herpetofaunal_atlas.php