



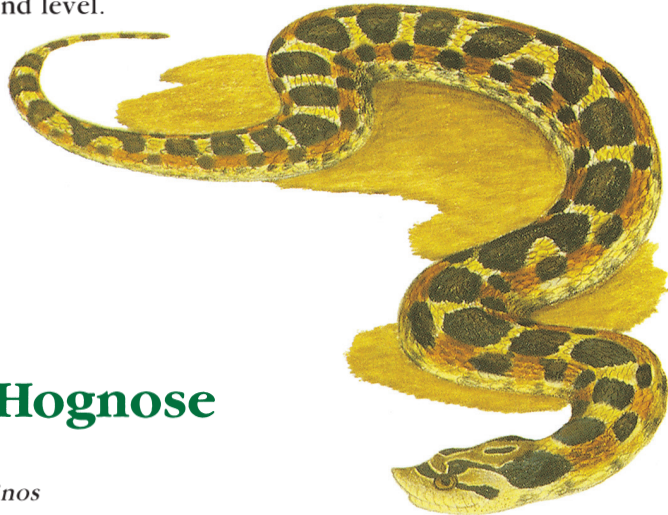
Louisiana. The entire state has some population of black rat snakes, and it is seen quite frequently.

Habitat. The black rat snake occupies a variety of habitats. Anglers, hikers and farmers can expect to see one of these large snakes almost anywhere. It prefers hardwood forests, wooded valleys and hillsides, but the black rat snake might feel just as welcome in an old field, barnyard or active farmland.

Farms might be a favorite because they usually offer a good supply of mice and other small mammals. The black rat snake is an excellent climber and uses small angles protruding from the belly scales to grip the rough bark of a tree. This ability allows easy access to the hollow cavity of an old tree and possible relief from unbearably hot summer temperatures. As winter approaches, the black rat snake seeks shelter underground, sometimes denning with rattlesnakes or copperheads.

Reproduction. The black rat snake locates a suitable mate and breeds in April to June or sometimes not until autumn. By June through August five to 30 eggs are left by the female in decayed logs, piles of leaf litter or under an amply sized rock. The eggs are smooth-shelled and leathery when deposited. They are covered with a moist, glue-like substance that hardens and adheres to the eggs as it dries, becoming slightly yellowish in the process. This causes the eggs themselves to become glued together. The eggs are oblong and 1½ to just over two inches in length. The incubation period takes seven to 15 weeks and ends with the emergence of young black rat snakes 10 to 16 inches long.

Food. The black rat snake hunts on and off the ground because it is capable of climbing with little effort. The young of the species may feed on treefrogs, but also take mice and other small mammals. Birds and their eggs fall prey to the black rat snake, too, so it is evident that not all of its foraging is restricted to ground level.



Eastern Hognose Snake

Heterodon platyrhinos

General characteristics. The hognose snake has been pegged with several formidable-sounding nicknames: puff adder, hissing adder and spreading adder. All arise from a behavior contrived to scare off would-be attackers. When disturbed, the hognose snake widens its neck to take on a hood-like appearance (See Figure VI-17). It does this by flattening the head and neck, spreading long rib bones outward. Then, inflating the body with air, hiss-

ing and striking out, the hognose snake suddenly resembles a fearsome-looking creature, but it is harmless.

If awards in various categories were given to snakes, the eastern hognose snake would win hands down for “most dramatic performance.” It alternates between playing dead and performing a series of aggressive-looking maneuvers that ultimately prove to be more of a decoy than anything else.

If approached, the hognose snake may attempt to fool the intruder by rolling over and “playing dead.” A few convulsive jerks may first set the stage and then with mouth agape and tongue hanging out, the performance ends with the body frozen in place. If picked up, the snake suddenly goes limp. But returned upright to the ground it again quickly rolls over on its back, apparently forgetting it is “dead.”

In Pennsylvania, the eastern hognose snake resides in a major portion of the state, although it is not found in abundant numbers. Adult sizes vary from 18 to 45 inches.

Identification. A pointed and slightly upturned snout gives the hognose snake its name. It has a wide neck leading to a stout body. The body color varies and may be yellow, tan, brown, gray or reddish-hued. More or less square blotches appear on the back, alternating on their edges with round dark spots. Some specimens have been observed on which there are no discernible blotches. Instead, they are a uniform black, brown or greenish. The belly is yellow, light gray or pinkish and is mottled with gray or shades of green. The underside of the tail is lighter than the belly. A divided anal plate and scales that are keeled complete the description.

Range. The eastern hognose snake, though limited in numbers, inhabits roughly the eastern two-thirds of the state. Its range arcs from Somerset County in the southwest to Wayne County in the northeast. It also dwells in a portion of the Lake Erie Drainage. Outside of Pennsylvania, its range extends from New England to Florida and west to Minnesota and Texas.

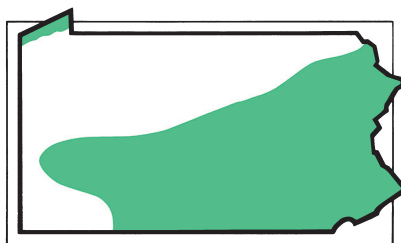
Habitat. The hognose snake likes dry terrain, preferring open areas, thinly wooded uplands or rock-strewn hillsides. Sandy and other dry soil that is easily crumbled attracts the hognose snake, and it occasionally is seen by farmers working their cultivated fields. During the winter months, the hognose snake seeks relief by burrowing deeply into the soil.

Reproduction. Mating can occur in either the spring or fall. The hognose snake lays eggs usually in June or July, but sometimes as late as August. The female deposits from six to 61 eggs in a shallow cavity of loose or sandy



Figure VI-17

Spreading its neck hood-like is only one ploy used by the eastern hognose snake to scare off an intruder.





soil. Leathery, white and thin-shelled when released, they are about 1¼ inches in length and elongated. The eggs swell to become more spherical while increasing in size by about one-third. They hatch in 40 to 65 days, producing youngsters of about six to nine inches in length. The hatchlings display the same markings as the adult hognose snake, but tend to be more gray than yellowish brown.

Food. The eastern hognose snake is most active during the day. That's when it feeds. Toads and frogs are the mainstay of the hognose snake diet, although salamanders may be added. The young hognose snake consumes crickets and other insects.



Eastern Kingsnake

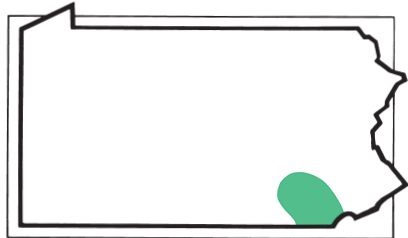
Lampropeltis getulus getulus

General characteristics. Although it has been described as an attractive snake, the eastern kingsnake is one of the least sociable, clashing at times with other snakes. It has been known to wrap itself around copperheads and other snakes to suffocate its victims. The kingsnake is reputedly immune to the venom of pit vipers.

The kingsnake becomes nocturnal during the hottest days of summer, but otherwise it is most active during the daylight hours. It shows a particular preference for moving about in the early morning hours and again toward twilight. The kingsnake is a close relative of the more common milk snake. It is a large snake, reaching adult sizes of three to over six feet. It has been known by several other names, such as thunder snake and chain snake.

Identification. Its nickname "chain snake" is descriptive of the bold yellow or white chain-like pattern that laces the body. This design contrasts sharply with the rest of the body, which is chocolate brown to shiny black. Yellow or white blotches often cover the black belly. The kingsnake's narrow head is marked with yellow-white. The neck is distinct and emphasizes the stout, cylindrical body. Smooth scales cover the body. The anal plate is single.

Range. In Pennsylvania, the eastern kingsnake historically has been recorded from a very limited area, in parts of two counties in the southeast. However, no verified specimens exist from Pennsylvania, and the status of this species as a bona fide member of our snake fauna is still questionable. It is known from southern New Jersey to Florida and west to the Appalachians and southern Alabama.



Habitat. The kingsnake is primarily a terrestrial creature, although it makes its way up the trunks and branches of shrubs and small trees every so often. Its preferred habitat consists of rocky, wooded hillsides, especially those