

near water. It can be found within swampy areas as well. Stream banks are a favorite haunt because they often are a ready source of turtle eggs and water snakes. The kingsnake is a willing swimmer when the occasion calls for it. Logs, debris and piles of loose rocks offer hiding places for this often secretive reptile.

Reproduction. Seeking and finding a mate from early spring to late June allows the female to deposit from five to more than 20 eggs sometime from June through July. The eggs are leathery and yellowish to creamy white. More or less elongated, the eggs measure 1¼ to nearly three inches long. The female coils herself around the eggs perhaps for a day or two and then departs. After incubating eight to 11 weeks, the eggs hatch to produce a miniature version of the parents. The hatchlings measure nine to 12 inches.

Food. The eastern kingsnake is a strong constrictor and uses this physical power to disable its prey. Its menu consists of other snakes including copperheads and rattlesnakes. It is thought immune to the venom of the state's poisonous snakes and thus can attack these species with little apparent harm to itself. It also pursues lizards, rodents and birds and their eggs.



Eastern Milk Snake

Lampropeltis triangulum triangulum

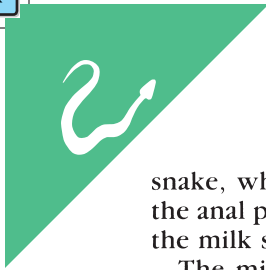
General characteristics. In Pennsylvania at least, the eastern milk snake is the subject of more tales and is more often mistakenly identified than any other snake. It is among the state's most beneficial snakes, but sadly, is also the most often killed in mistake for a copperhead. Actually, there is only a superficial resemblance between these two snakes. The head of the copperhead is an easily recognized coppery color without any marks. The head of the milk snake is light with brownish marks. The belly of the copperhead is unmarked and a uniform cream or off-white. The belly of the milk snake is white with dark splotches resembling a checkerboard pattern (See Figure VI-18).

Other snakes confused with the milk snake include the northern water snake with its keeled scales, compared to the milk snake's smooth scales. The northern water snake also has a divided anal plate. The milk snake's anal plate is single. The juvenile northern black racer and black rat

Belly of Eastern Milk Snake and Northern Copperhead



Figure VI-18



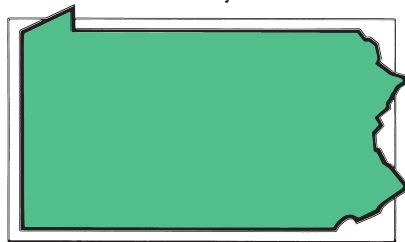
snake, which unlike their adult counterparts are patterned, can be told by the anal plate. Both have divided anal plates compared to the single plate of the milk snake.

The milk snake, contrary to popular belief, does not milk cows. Thus, this alleged habit hardly contributed to its name. Rather, the name probably originated from its habit of spending a lot of time around barns, not a bad idea considering its fondness for mice.

The eastern milk snake, although considered to be more secretive than many other snakes, still is seen quite often. It appears in numbers throughout its range. Adults attain lengths of two to over four feet when fully grown.

Identification. The most important identifying characteristic of the eastern milk snake is its belly. The belly is white or cream-colored with dark more or less square splotches that create a checkerboard effect. This definitive pattern separates the milk snake from the copperhead, which has a uniformly colored white to grayish belly with sometimes mottled markings or cloudy blotches (See Figure VI-18). The body of the eastern milk snake is gray or tan. This color is interrupted with chocolate-brown to reddish-brown blotches or saddles that cross over the back and down each side. These darker saddles are bordered with black. They are widest across the back, nearly rectangular but may become narrower as they continue down the sides. This, too, can be used to distinguish the milk snake from the copperhead, which has dark bands that are at their narrowest across the back, wider at the bottom. Smaller, dark blotches also appear low on the side, near the belly. They fall in place between the bottoms of the larger saddles. A Y-shaped or V-shaped dark mark appears on the nape of the neck, extending onto the head. Smooth scales shield the body and the anal plate is single.

Range. You are likely to run into the eastern milk snake nearly anywhere in the state because it is distributed in all 67 counties. It occurs over much of the Northeast, extending well into Canada and west to Minnesota.



Habitat. The milk snake does not prefer any particular type of habitat and is apt to reside in suburban as well as rural areas. Damp bottomland, meadows and farmland harbor the milk snake. But pine forests, open deciduous forests and rocky hillsides also are acceptable to the milk snake in which to make its home and forage for food. Rotting logs and damp trash offer convenient places for the milk snake to take refuge.

Reproduction. Leaving the den during the spring months, the eastern milk snake immediately begins its search for a mate. In June or July, the female deposits from six to 25 or more elliptically shaped eggs, often in a rotted log. The eggs incubate for six to nine weeks, and in August or September the juveniles emerge. Some five to 11 inches long, they are more brightly colored and their patterns more sharply contrasted than their parents.

Food. The eastern milk snake's favorite prey is small rodents, and mice make up the largest portion of this group. Other snakes, including venomous species, also are taken, and lizards and an occasional bird supplement the diet.