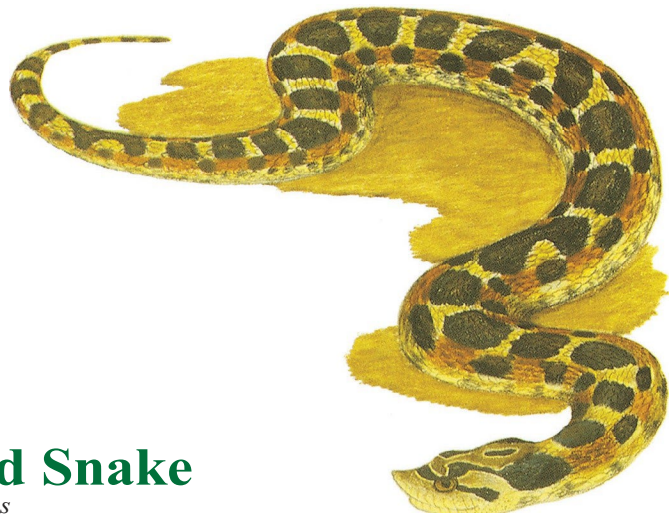


Eastern Hog-nosed Snake

Heterodon platyrhinos

General characteristics. The hog-nosed 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 hog-nosed 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, hissing and striking out, the hog-nosed snake suddenly resembles a fearsome-looking creature, but it is harmless.

If awards in various categories were given to snakes, the eastern hog-nosed 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 hog-nosed 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."

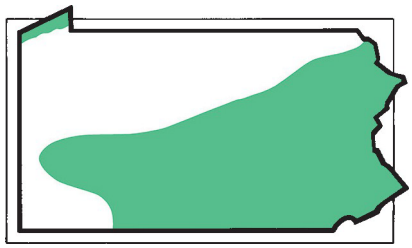
In Pennsylvania, the eastern hog-nosed snake lives in a major portion of the state, although it is not found in abundant numbers. Adult sizes range from 18 to 45 inches.

Figure Vl-17
Spreading its neck hood-like is only one ploy used by the eastern hognose snake to scare off an intruder

Identification. A pointed and slightly upturned snout gives the hog-nosed 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 hog-nosed 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 hog-nosed 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 hog-nosed 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 soil. Leathery, white and thin-shelled when released, they are about **1** ¼ 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 hog-nosed snake, but tend to be more gray than yellowish brown.

Food. The eastern hog-nosed 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.