



Butler's Garter Snake (*Thamnophis butleri*)

Tham-noe-fiss but-ler-eye



*Sam Fellows



*Nate Melhorn

Harmless/Nonvenomous

Description: 15 to 22 inches. The Butler's garter snake is a fairly small, but heavily bodied garter snake with a ground color of black, dark brown, to olive brown with three whitish to pale yellow longitudinal stripes. The belly is pale yellow to cream colored with small, dark flecks along the margins of the ventral scutes. Lateral stripes usually cover scale rows 2, 3, and part of 4, and the head and neck are relatively small and indistinct, which both distinguish it from other garter snakes. They may hybridize with the common garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*) and plains garter snake (*Thamnophis radix*), making positive identification of some specimens difficult.

Scales: Keeled

Anal Plate: Undivided

Taxonomy and Classification:

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Serpentes

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Infraorder: Alethinophidia

Family: Colubridae

Subfamily: Natricinae

Genus: *Thamnophis*

Species: *Thamnophis butleri**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Similar/Confusing Species: Ribbon snakes (*Thamnophis proximus*) and (*Thamnophis sauritus*) are generally much more slender bodied than garter snakes, have longer tails at the ventral scale, lateral stripes on scale rows 3 and 4, and white, cream colored, to lighter labial and ventral scales. The plains garter snake (*Thamnophis radix*) has lateral stripes covering scale rows 3 and 4, and has dark barring/markings on the labial scales. Common garter snakes (*Thamnophis sirtalis*) have lateral stripes part of scale rows 1, and all of 2 and 3, and have a broader, more distinct head and neck. Lined snakes (*Tropidoclonion lineatum*) have a row of linear, dark pencil point markings on the ventral surface. Red bellied snakes (*Storeria occipitomaculata*) and DeKay's brown snakes (*Storeria dekayi*) have divided anal plates, and usually have 3 paler distinct longitudinal stripes, unlike garter snakes.

Etymology: Thamnophis- Thamn (bush) ophio (snake). butleri-in honor of Australian naturalist William Henry "Harry" Butler.

Subspecies: None.

Range & Habitat: Butler's garter snakes occupy only the southeastern portion of Wisconsin. Within this range, the Butler's garter snake may occupy moist or wet prairies, old fields, vacant lots, meadows, and edges of ponds, marshes, and other wetlands.

Habits & Natural History: Butler's garter snakes are a small, stout bodied species of garter snake that, like other garter snakes, tends to be most active diurnally, feeding on small fish, frogs, earthworms, and other invertebrates. As with other garter snakes, this species is viviparous, or live bearing. Formerly listed as a state threatened species in Wisconsin, Butler's garter snakes have recently since been downgraded to "special concern" status primarily due to housing development politics. The Butler's garter snake is a species that, along with its preferred habitat, nonetheless requires continued monitoring and conservation by state officials and concerned citizens in order to maintain this unique species in Wisconsin.

Phenology: Butler's garter snakes emerge from overwintering as early as mid to late April or May, and remain active throughout the year through late September or October (or even later into the year if warmer temperatures persist or otherwise permit).

Conservation Status: WI Special Concern and "Protected Wild Animal". Formerly WI State Threatened. Regulated by the WI DNR. IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

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Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this species, group of species, or this informational sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at info@madisonherps.org

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