



DeKay's Brown Snake (*Storeria dekayi*)

Stor-er-ia dee-kay-eye



Description: 7-15 inches. The DeKay's, or brown snake is a small snake with somewhat keeled scales. Background color can range from light brown, to tan, to grayish brown with a wider, pale colored dorsal stripe. This dorsal stripe is usually bordered by two rows of small, dark pencil point spots, often grading into longitudinal stripes further along the body. In some subspecies, the dark markings may cross over the dorsal stripe forming ladder-like patterning or cross barring. The head usually has several dark post and sub ocular markings as well. The belly is cream colored to pinkish, sometimes with scattered pencil point flecks.

Scales: Semi-Keeled

Anal Plate: Divided

Taxonomy and Classification:

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata/Vertebrata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Suborder: Serpentes

Infraorder: Alethinophidia

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Family: Colubridae

Subfamily: Natricinae

Genus: Storeria

Species: *Storeria dekayi**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Similar/Confusing Species: Red bellied snakes (*Storeria occipitomaculata*) lack the dorsal pencil point and/or ladder-like striping/crossbanding, and have reddish to reddish-orange ventral surfaces. Ringneck snakes (*Diadophis punctatus ssp.*) have a solid, unpatterned/unmarked dorsum, marked or unmarked yellow to reddish-orange ventral surfaces, and a distinct yellow to orangeish-yellow neck ring. Garter snakes (*Thamnophis sp.*) have undivided anal plates, and usually have three lighter colored longitudinal stripes. Lined snakes (*Tropidoclonion lineatum*) have a row of linear dark markings on the ventral surface, three rows of longitudinal stripes, and an undivided anal plate.

Etymology: *Storeria*- In honor of David H. Storer (1804-1894). *dekayi*- in honor of James E. DeKay (1792-1851). *wrightorum* (in honor of Albert H. and Anna A. Wright. *texana* (Texas).

Subspecies: Texas brown snake (*Storeria d. texana*) and Midland brown snake (*Storeria d. wrightorum*). May intergrade in western Wisconsin where ranges overlap.

Range & Habitat: Occurs in the southern two thirds of Wisconsin, but is most common in southern Wisconsin. DeKay's brown snakes occupy a wide range of habitats including prairies, old fields, oak savannahs, vacant lots, forest and woodlot edges, and marsh edges.

Habits & Natural History: DeKay's, or brown snakes, are a small secretive species, often being found in microhabitats such as under rocks, logs, fallen bark, trash, and other natural or manmade debris. They feed primarily on earthworms, insects, and other soft bodied invertebrates, but may consume the occasional small salamander or frog as well. DeKay's brown snakes are completely harmless to humans, but many individuals may emit musk and attempt to bluff in order to appear more formidable. Oviparous, or live bearing.

Phenology: DeKay's/brown 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 Common with no special protections, but regulated by the WI DNR. IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

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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