



Eastern Hognose Snake (*Heterodon platirhinos*)

Het-er-oh-don –plat-ih-rye-nohs



Harmless/Very Mildly Venomous, But Not Dangerous to Humans

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Description: 15 to 30 inches. The eastern hognose snake is a medium sized, heavy bodied snake that can be quite variable in color and pattern. Ground color can range from light to dark brown, tan, yellowish, olive, blackish, gray, reddish brown, to reddish-orange. Patterned specimens have a series of 3 darker rows of irregular, alternating blotches, and almost always a pair of enlarged, darker blotches on the neck. Some specimens may be unpatterned, or indistinctly patterned, and may be gray, olive, brown, or even melanistic (excess of black pigment). The head is fairly broad and rostral scale distinctly upturned. The ventral surface is usually unpatterned, and ranges from cream colored to light to dark gray with the underside of the tail being lighter.

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

Family: Colubridae

Subfamily: Xenodontinae

Genus: Heterodon

Species: *Heterodon platirhinos**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Similar/Confusing Species: Bullsnares (*Pituophis catenifer sayi*) have less pronounced rostral scales, non-uniform blotching over the body, and less elaborate bluffing, defensive, and death feigning behaviors.

Etymology: Heterodon- Heteros (different) odon (tooth). platirhinos-platys (broad, wide, flat); rhinos (nose, snout).

Subspecies: None.

Range & Habitat: The eastern hognose snake generally occurs over the southern two thirds of Wisconsin, ranging into northwestern and northeastern portions of the state, but is absent or unrecorded in the north central region. They can be found in a variety of habitats, but favor sandy or loamy soil including meadows, prairies, southern to northern mixed or deciduous forests, oak savannahs, grasslands, pine barrens, pine plantations, river bottom forests, and agricultural areas.

Habits & Natural History: Eastern hognose snakes are a medium sized, stout bodied snake that is

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perhaps most well known for their elaborate defensive displays when disturbed. When first encountered, hognose snakes may flatten the head and neck (often causing them to be mistaken for a cobra, which do not occur in Wisconsin), produce a loud and raspy sounding hiss, and may engage in other mock displays such as striking. If the initial display fails, they will flip over and writhe in the substrate with an open mouth while defecating, musking, and/or regurgitating and then feign death by remaining limp and listless until the threat passes. These snakes also possess a spade like rostral (nose) scale, enabling them to burrow in search of their preferred prey-frogs and toads, or to construct nesting sites. Hognose snakes also possess enlarged rearward facing teeth used primarily in subduing smaller prey, but are considered harmless to humans. Eastern hognose snakes are oviparous, or egg laying.

Phenology: Eastern hognose 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. 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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