



Eastern Ribbon Snake (*Thamnophis sauritus ssp.*)

Tham-noe-fiss sore-eye-tiss



*Sam Fellows



*Nate Melhorn

Harmless/Nonvenomous

Description: 18 to 26 inches in length. The northern ribbon snake is a very slender bodied species of garter snake that ranges in ground color from black to dark brown or olive brown. Three yellow to white longitudinal dorsal and lateral stripes are present, with the lateral stripes covering scale rows 3 and 4. The head is unpatterned, wider than the neck, and dark brown to black with white or pale colored labial scales. The ventral surface is similar to other garter snakes, and can be pale yellow, grayish, to cream colored.

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

Infraorder: Alethinophidia

Family: Colubridae

Subfamily: Natricinae

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Genus: *Thamnophis*

Species: *Thamnophis sauritus**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Similar/Confusing Species: Garter snakes (*Thamnophis radix*, *Thamnophis butleri*, and *Thamnophis sirtalis*) generally are stockier bodied than ribbon snakes, have shorter tails at the ventral scute, lack parietal spots atop their heads, have 5-8 labial scales present, and have darker colored labial and ventral scales. The western ribbon snake (*Thamnophis proximus*) has narrower, less well defined ventrolateral stripes, 8 supralabial scales, and has fused parietal spots atop the head.

Etymology: Thamnophis- Thamnos (bush) ophio (snake). sauritus-sauros (lizard, reptile). septentrionalis-septentrio (north or northern) alis.

Subspecies: Northern Ribbon snake (*Thamnophis sauritus septentrionalis*).

Range & Habitat: Distribution is scattered and local in counties in eastern, south central, and northeastern Wisconsin. In Wisconsin, this species has been found to be associated with remnant southern bog habitat.

Habits & Natural History: The northern ribbon snake, a subspecies of the eastern ribbon snake, is a small to medium sized, very slender bodied species of garter snake. As with other garter and ribbon snakes, northern ribbon snakes are active and primarily diurnal predators of earthworms and other soft bodied invertebrates, small fish, and frogs. These ribbon snakes are threatened in the state by critical habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation. Although endangered, with few documented records, northern ribbon snakes have been found in the state fairly recently by dedicated field observers. As with other garter and ribbon snake species, eastern ribbon snakes are viviparous, or live-bearing.

Phenology: As with many other Wisconsin snakes, eastern/northern ribbon snakes probably 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 State Endangered, 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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