



Milk Snake (*Lampropeltis triangulum*)

Lam-pro-pell-tiss try-an-gyoo-lum



Adults (top), Juvenile (bottom)

Harmless/Nonvenomous

Description: 24 to 36 inches. The milk snake occurring in Wisconsin is a medium sized, fairly slender bodied snake with smooth scales. Ground color can range from tan to light brown to cream colored, with three rows of alternating brown to reddish brown blotches bordered with black. Juveniles are often more vibrantly colored than adults, with bright brick-red blotches. There is often a pale “Y” or “V” shaped marking on the back of the head and neck. The belly is usually a black and white “checkered” pattern.

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Scales: Smooth
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: Colubrinae

Genus: Lampropeltis

Species: *Lampropeltis triangulum**

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

Similar/Confusing Species: Eastern fox snakes (*Pantherophis vulpinus*) have semi-keeled scales and divided anal plates. Bullsnares (*Pituophis catenifer sayi*) have semi keeled scales, a slightly upturned rostral scale, and non-uniform blotches throughout the body. Northern/common water snakes (*Nerodia sipedon*) have semi-keeled scales, reddish to reddish brown half-moons and speckling on the ventral surface, and divided anal plates. Juvenile racers (*Coluber constrictor*) have larger eyes, narrower dorsal blotches and mottling that tapers towards the tail, and divided anal plates. Juvenile midland/gray ratsnakes (*Pantherophis spiloides*) lack the deep reddish dorsal blotches of milk snakes, have weakly keeled scales, more irregularly shaped dorsal blotches, and divided anal plates.

Etymology: Lampropeltis- Lampros (bright, brilliant, or radiant) pelta (small shield). triangulum-triangulus (having three angles).

Subspecies: None Currently.

Range & Habitat: Milk snakes occupy the southern two thirds of Wisconsin, where they can be locally common. They apparently seem to be much less common in central Wisconsin, however. They can be found in a variety of habitats including deciduous or mixed forests, woodlots, old fields, prairies, oak savannah, margins of wetlands, and agricultural and residential areas.

Habits & Natural History: The milk snake is a fairly secretive species, often being found in or under cover such as rocks, logs, and other natural or manmade debris or rubble. They are quite beneficial to the homeowner, gardener, and farmer in that these constrictors feed on rodents, as well as occasionally frogs, lizards, and smaller snakes. Like many snakes, they may rapidly vibrate their tails in debris or vegetation when alarmed, but are harmless and beneficial snakes to humans. Contrary to popular myth,

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these snakes do not inhabit barns to suckle milk from cows; instead they feed on rodents. Oviparous (egg laying).

Phenology: Milk 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 Locally Common, 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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