



Red bellied Snake (*Storeria occipitomaculata*)

Stor-er-ia ossi-pito-mac-u-lata



Reddish/Brown phase (top left), two toned phase (top right), Gray Phase (lower left), belly (lower right)

Harmless/Nonvenomous

Description: 7 to 12 inches. The red bellied snake is a small species of snake with somewhat keeled scales. Color can be quite variable, ranging from gray, blackish, brownish gray, tan to light brown, to reddish brown, with a wide, paler dorsal stripe. This dorsal stripe is bordered with two dark, narrow longitudinal stripes, and may be of a different color than the ground color, giving some specimens a two toned appearance. There are usually 1 to 3 pale colored spots around the neck as well. The belly, or

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ventral surface is almost always bright red to reddish orange.

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: Natricinae

Genus: *Storeria*

Species: *Storeria occipitomaculata**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Similar/Confusing Species: DeKay's brown snakes (*Storeria dekayi*) have two rows of dark, pencil point dorsal markings/longitudinal stripes, and a pale cream to pinkish ventral surface. Garter snakes (*Thamnophis sp.*) have more well defined longitudinal stripes, and lack a reddish-orange ventral surface. Ringneck snakes (*Diadophis punctatus ssp.*) are uniformly colored and patterned on the dorsum, and have a brighter, more distinct ring on the neck/nape. Western worm snakes (*Carphophis vermis*) have smooth scales, pinkish to reddish-pink laterals, and a reduced, flattened head.

Etymology: Storeria- In honor of David H. Storer (1804-1894). occipitomaculata-occiput (back part of the head); macula (spot, or mark).

Subspecies: None.

Range & Habitat: Ranges statewide in Wisconsin. Red bellied snakes can be common to abundant in mixed and hardwood forests, woodlots, and edges of fields, meadows, bogs, marshes, and other wetlands.

Habits & Natural History: Red bellied snakes are a small, secretive species of snake, often seen or discovered under natural and manmade debris including rocks, logs, leaf litter, bark, and other debris. These snakes feed mainly on small earthworms, slugs, insects, and other soft bodied invertebrates, and are completely harmless and even beneficial to human interests in that they will feed on nuisance slugs in gardens and backyards. Red bellied snakes may also partake in a few peculiar defensive displays as well, presumably to startle or confuse a potential predator including "lip curling" and stiffening their bodies and sometimes partially feigning death. Red bellied snakes are viviparous, or live bearing.

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Phenology: Red bellied 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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