



## **Ringneck Snake (*Diadophis punctatus ssp.*)**

*Dee-ah-dop-fiss punc-tat-iss ed-ward-see and are-nee*



*Prairie (left), Northern (right)*

**Description:** 10 to 16 inches. Ringneck snakes are a small, smooth scaled snake with a uniformly colored background color ranging from black, bluish black, to gray. Both subspecies found in Wisconsin almost always have a distinct, yellow to yellowish-orange ring around the neck. The belly in the northern subspecies tend to be a plain yellow with few to no dark pencil point flecks. The belly of the prairie subspecies, however, tends to be yellow to orange-yellow, grading into a brighter red to reddish orange towards the ventral caudal scales with numerous dark flecks throughout.

Scales: Smooth (both subspecies)

Anal Plate: Divided (both subspecies)

### **Taxonomy and Classification:**

**Life:** All living, physical, and animate entities

**Domain:** Eukaryota

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**Kingdom:** Animalia  
**Phylum:** Chordata/Vertebrata  
**Class:** Reptilia  
**Order:** Squamata  
**Suborder:** Serpentes  
**Infraorder:** Alethinophidia  
**Family:** Colubridae  
**Subfamily:** Dipsadinae  
**Genus:** *Diadophis*  
**Species:** *Diadophis punctatus*\*

\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

**Similar/Confusing Species:** Red bellied snakes (*Storeria occipitomaculata*) and DeKay's brown snakes (*Storeria dekayi*) have semi-keeled scales, less well defined neck rings, and have faint longitudinal stripes or other patterning on the dorsum. Western worm snakes (*Carphophis vermis*) have pinkish to reddish laterals not uniform with the dorsum, lack a distinctive ring around the nape, and have comparatively smaller, flatter heads.

**Etymology:** *Diadophis*- Diadem (headband) ophios (serpent, or reptile). *punctatus*-punctum (small hole, or spot). *arnyi* (patronym for Samuel Arny). *edwardsi* (patronym for George Edwards (1694-1773)).

**Subspecies:** Northern ringneck snake (*Diadophis p. edwardsii*) and Prairie ringneck snake (*Diadophis p. arnyi*).

**Range & Habitat:** In Wisconsin, the northern ringneck snake ranges across the northern third of the state and possibly further south along Lake Michigan in extreme eastern Wisconsin. The prairie ringneck snake occupies southwestern, western, and west central Wisconsin, where the subspecies may intergrade. Northern ringneck snakes may be found in moist northern forests, woodlands, nearby meadows, and forest edges, while the prairie ringneck snake may be found in cedar glade, bluff prairie, old quarries, and road cuts.

**Habits & Natural History:** Ringneck snakes are small, secretive snakes, often being found under logs, flat rocks, leaf litter, and other natural or manmade debris, where they feed on insects, earthworms, arthropods, and occasionally small amphibians. These small species are harmless and inoffensive to humans, but some subspecies, such as the prairie ringneck snake, may emit musk and form a "corkscrew" using their tails to display their vibrantly colored ventral surface to warn or startle predators. Ringneck snakes are not known to secrete any "poisons" however. Oviparous, or egg laying.

**Phenology:** Ringneck 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).

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**Conservation Status:** WI Both subspecies Special Concern; Regulated by 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](mailto:info@madisonherps.org)

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