



## Slender Glass Lizard (*Ophisaurus attenuatus*)

*Oaf-fee-saur-iss atten-you-ate-iss*



**Description:** 18 to 42 inches in length. The western slender glass lizard is an elongated, cylindrical bodied, limbless lizard that strongly resembles a snake. However, unlike snakes, eye lids and visible external ear openings are present. Ground color can range from tan, light brown, to bronze with a darker, narrow brown to reddish brown dorsal stripe. Two darker lateral stripes bordered above and below by paler, lighter colored stripes are also present. The lizard's ventral surface ranges from white, cream colored, to pale yellow.

### **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:** Lacertillia  
**Infraorder:** Diploglossa  
**Family:** Anguidae  
**Genus:** Ophisaurus

**Species:** *Ophisaurus attenuatus*\*

\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

**Similar/Confusing Species:** All Wisconsin snakes (Serpentes) lack external ear openings and eyelids, and have more flexible bodies and skeletal structures. Otherwise, the western slender glass lizard is not likely to be confused with other Wisconsin lizards.

**Etymology:** Ophisaurus- Ophis (reptile or serpent) sarous (lizard or reptile). attenuatus-tapered, thin, drawn out.

**Subspecies:** Western slender glass lizard (*Ophisaurus attenuatus attenuatus*).

**Range & Habitat:** In Wisconsin, this species ranges from within the central and west central portions of the state. Western slender glass lizards prefer, and are associated with sandy soiled habitats including sand prairies, oak and pine barrens, oak savannahs, and old fields.

**Habits & Natural History:** The western slender glass lizard is a legless species of lizard, and the largest lizard species in Wisconsin. Once formerly abundant in appropriate habitat in Wisconsin, glass lizard populations have declined drastically due to habitat loss, degradation, and manmade conversion of former habitat to development and pine plantations. They are now currently given state endangered species status. Glass lizards may often initially be mistaken for a snake, but unlike snakes, possess eye lids and external ear openings. They also possess a more rigid skeletal and body structure than most snakes. As with many other lizards, slender glass lizards can undergo caudal autotomy, or shedding of their tails, to avoid predators or when disturbed. Approximately half of the lizard's body is tail, which may have given rise to their still used common name of "glass snake". Glass lizards feed on insects and other arthropods, but may occasionally consume newborn rodents as well. Western slender glass lizards are oviparous, or egg laying.

**Phenology:** Western slender glass lizards emerge from overwintering as early as 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).

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## **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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