



Western Ribbon Snake (*Thamnophis proximus ssp.*)

Tham-noe-fiss prox-im-iss



**Photos by Sam Fellows*

Harmless/Nonvenomous

Description: 15 to 30 inches in length. The western ribbon snake is a very slender bodied garter snake ranging in background color from black, dark brown, to olive brown with three lighter colored longitudinal stripes. These stripes can range from white, yellowish, orange, to orange-yellow in color and cover scale rows 3 and 4. The black to dark brown head is wider than the neck, has a single white to yellow spot, and the labial scales are white or paler in color. 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 proximus**

*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, and have darker colored labial and ventral scales. The eastern ribbon snake (*Thamnophis sauritus*) has broader, more well defined ventrolateral stripes, 7 supralabial scales, and has absent or faded/unfused parietal spots atop the head.

Etymology: Thamnophis- Thamnos (bush) ophio (snake). proximus-nearest.

Subspecies: Orange Striped Ribbon snake (*Thamnophis proximus proximus*).

Range & Habitat: In Wisconsin, known only from three counties throughout the state; Sauk, Racine, and Clark. This species may be found in moist, grassy edge habitats associated with ponds, lakes, marshes, rivers, streams, and ditches. No recent records for Wisconsin in over 10 years, however.

Habits & Natural History: The western ribbon snake, sometimes known as the orange striped ribbon snake, is a small to medium sized, very slender bodied species of garter snake. As with other species, western ribbon snakes are active, diurnal predators, feeding on small fish, frogs, salamanders, earthworms, and other invertebrates. A common species over much of its range in the United States, they emerge from hibernation along with other snake species in April and May to reproduce before dispersing for the remainder of the year. Little more is known about the likely habits of western ribbon snakes in Wisconsin, assuming this species still occurs in the state. Western ribbon snakes are viviparous, or live bearing.

Phenology: As with many other Wisconsin snakes, western 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), but in need of updating.

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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