



Western Worm Snake (*Carphophis vermis*)

Car-fo-fiss ver-miss



Photos by Rebecca Wyman and Ryan McVeigh

Harmless/Nonvenomous

Description: 6 to 12 inches. The western worm snake is a small, smooth and sleek scaled snake with a uniformly colored dorsal surface ranging from blackish, dark purplish, to bluish black. The ventral and lateral sides are a lighter uniform reddish, to pinkish in color. The head is somewhat small and fairly flattened and the tail ends in a spike.

Scales: Smooth

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

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Infraorder: Alethinophidia

Family: Colubridae

Subfamily: Xenodontinae

Genus: Carphophis

Species: *Carphophis vermis**

*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

Similar/Confusing Species: Ringneck snakes (*Diadophis punctatus* ssp.) have a distinct ring around the nape/necks, somewhat larger, less flattened heads, and the laterals are the same color as the dorsum. Red bellied snakes (*Storeria occipitomaculata*) and DeKay's brown snakes (*Storeria dekayi*) have semi keeled scales, faint longitudinal striping or dorsum patterning, and broader/more distinct heads.

Etymology: Carphophis- Karphos (any dry particle", chaff, straw) ophios (serpent or reptile). vermis-worm.

Subspecies: None.

Range & Habitat: In Wisconsin, only currently known from one county in extreme southwestern Wisconsin, but may be present in additional western and/or southwestern counties. Habitat in which this snake has been found in WI consists of open to semi open cedar glade, bluff prairie, and surrounding deciduous forest and open woodland.

Habits & Natural History: The western worm snake is a small, secretive, fossorial species of snake most often seen and found underneath natural or manmade debris including logs, flat rocks, and leaf litter. Relatively little is known about the habits and natural history of western worm snakes in Wisconsin, as only a small number of specimens have been documented. This species feeds primarily on earthworms, insects, and other small, soft bodied invertebrates, and is harmless and inoffensive to humans when handled. Western worm snakes are oviparous, or egg laying.

Phenology: Relatively little is known about western worm snake natural history in Wisconsin, but as with many other Wisconsin snake species, they 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 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

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