

Common Snakes in Pennsylvania

Eastern Rat Snake

Often referred to as a “black rat snake,” this snake is the largest species of snake found in Pennsylvania. Adults can be 3½ feet to over 8 feet long.

Adult eastern rat snakes are black or dull brown with dark blotches. The skin between its scales may be bluish white, yellow or orange. They have a white chin and throat. Their belly is white or yellow with some mottling with black or gray. Their scales are smooth.

Young eastern rat snakes have dark blotches on a light-colored back. This dark pattern becomes faded or is often completely lost as the snake approaches 3 feet in length (about two-years-old).

These snakes live in a variety of habitats. They are superb climbers and are often seen in trees or barn rafters.



Eastern Rat Snake



Eastern Garter Snake

Eastern Garter Snake

If you like to spend time outside, chances are you will encounter an eastern garter snake. It is common throughout Pennsylvania in almost any habitat.

The eastern garter snake usually has three light-colored stripes on a dark-colored back. One narrow stripe usually runs down the center of the back. One broad stripe is on each side. A double row of dark spots often appears between the stripes. The garter snake has keeled scales.

Eastern Milk Snake

The eastern milk snake’s favorite food is mice. This makes it one of Pennsylvania’s most beneficial snakes. Unfortunately, it is often killed, because it is mistaken for a copperhead. Although both snakes have markings on their back, only the eastern milk snake has markings on its head.

The eastern milk snake has a light-colored back with brown

blotches outlined in black. Its belly is white with dark splotches that resemble a checkerboard. It has smooth scales.

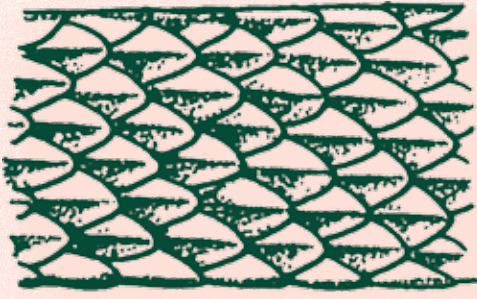
Eastern milk snakes can be found in most any habitat in almost any part of Pennsylvania.



Eastern Milk Snake

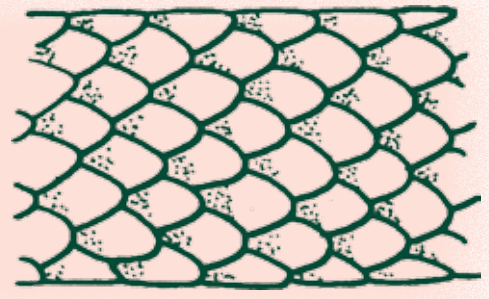


Copperhead



Keeled Scales

Snakes have either keeled scales or smooth scales. Keeled scales have a ridge down the middle. Snakes with keeled scales appear to have rough looking skin.

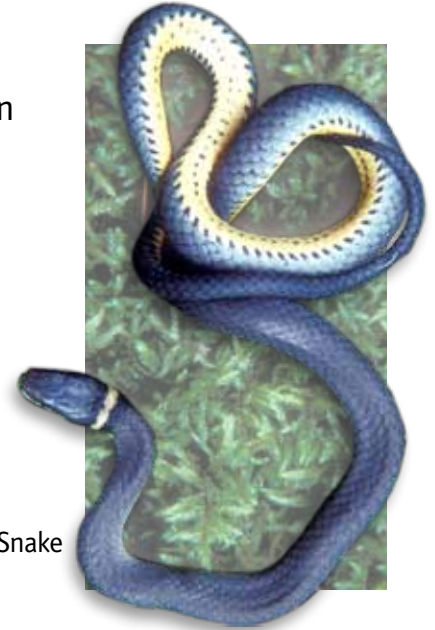


Smooth Scales

Northern Ringneck Snake

Northern ringneck snakes have a bright yellow to orange band around their neck. They are dark or bluish gray, black or olive brown on top with a bright orange or yellow underside. This snake has smooth scales. The northern ringneck snake is a slender snake that is usually less than 20 inches long. This snake is common in Pennsylvania. However, it is not often seen because it is active at night and rarely basks in the open. The northern ringneck snake prefers moist forest habitats where it can hide beneath rocks and logs. It primarily eats salamanders and earthworms. People sometimes find northern ringneck snakes, especially newly born snakes, in their basements. They rarely bite but may emit a foul-smelling odor when they are handled.

Northern Ringneck Snake



Northern Water Snake

Northern Water Snake

The northern water snake is often killed out of fear. People sometimes fear that it is a water moccasin, also called a cottonmouth. The cottonmouth is a venomous species not found in Pennsylvania. Others may mistake it for a copperhead.

The coloration of a northern water snake varies greatly. In general, it has brown or reddish-brown blotches on its back. In between these blotches, along the sides, are smaller rectangular blotches. The dark blotches on the water snake are wider than the spaces between them. As the water snake ages, it gets darker and will become all brown or dark gray. This snake has keeled scales.

Northern water snakes are not venomous, but they have a tendency to defend themselves viciously when threatened. It has strong jaws and can inflict a severe bite. If unable to flee or if cornered, it will strike repeatedly.

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