

EASTERN COPPERHEAD

Agkistrodon contortrix



Order: Squamata

Family: Viperidae

FNAI Ranks: G5/S2

U.S. Status: none

FL Status: none

Description: A medium-sized (to 3 ft. = 91 cm) venomous snake with a pattern of 16 - 21 brown, hourglass-shaped bands, sometimes broken in middle, on a pinkish-beige to rusty ground color. Belly light, with two rows of brown, square to round blotches. Head rust-colored and triangular, much wider than neck, with facial pit between each eye and nostril; pupils vertical. Dorsal scales keeled, anal scale undivided. Young about 10 in. (254 mm) and with yellow tail tip.

Similar Species: Young cottonmouth (*Agkistrodon piscivorus*) very similar but more brownish and with a broad, white-bordered, dark band through eye. All non-venomous Florida snakes have round pupils and lack facial pits. Florida water snake (*Nerodia fasciata pictiventris*), young red-bellied water snake (*N. erythrogaster*), and brown water snake (*N. taxispilota*) have smaller heads, and dorsal blotches or bands not forming hourglasses. Eastern hognose snake (*Heterodon platirhinos*) has upturned snout and rarely is coppery color.

Habitat: Hardwood forests along floodplains, ravines, and adjacent uplands including ruderal areas.

Seasonal Occurrence: Most active in spring and fall, with young born in late summer. May become nocturnal during hot weather. Inactive and secluded in winter.

Florida Distribution: Lands along the upper and middle Apalachicola River as well as along the Florida-Alabama border in westernmost Florida. A record in need of verification also exists for the Ochlockonee River drainage in southern Gadsden County.

Range-wide Distribution: Southeastern Coastal Plain, from Delaware and Maryland to Texas. A northern race extends to New York, the Midwest, and Kansas.

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Conservation Status: Occurs on several state and private conservation lands along the Apalachicola River. Some individuals are killed on highways.

Protection and Management: Maintain natural forested and floodplain habitats where species occurs. Avoid fragmentation of habitat by additional roads.

References: Ashton and Ashton 1988b, Conant and Collins 1991, Ernst and Barbour 1989, Moler (ed.) 1992, Mount 1975, Tenant 1997.



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Juvenile. Note yellow tail tip. © Robert Gundy