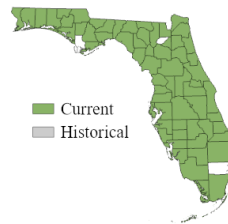


EASTERN INDIGO SNAKE

Drymarchon couperi

Order: Squamata
Family: Colubridae
FNAI Ranks: G3/S2?
U.S. Status: Threatened
FL Status: Threatened



Description: A very large, stout-bodied, shiny black snake reaching lengths as great as 8 ft. (244 cm). Black ventrally, but chin, throat, and sides of head may be reddish or (rarely) white. Scales typically smooth (no ridges), though adult males have keel on front half of some scales along back; anal scale undivided. Young similar to adults though often more reddish anteriorly, 17 - 24 in. (430 - 610 mm) at hatching. When encountered, often hisses, flattens neck vertically (from side to side), and vibrates tail, but rarely bites.

Similar Species: Black racer (*Coluber constrictor*), which rarely exceeds 5 ft. (152 cm), is more slender, a duller sooty black usually with a white chin and throat, and has a divided anal scale. The mostly aquatic mud snake (*Farancia abacura*) is glossy black above and can grow to 6 ft. (183 cm), but has a reddish, rarely white, belly, with the coloration encroaching the sides, and a sharp-pointed tail tip.

Habitat: Broad range of habitats, from scrub and sandhill to wet prairies and mangrove swamps. In northern part of range, often winters in gopher tortoise burrows in sandy uplands but forages in more hydric habitats. Requires very large tracts to survive.

Seasonal Occurrence: Active nearly year-round in southern Florida but winters underground farther north. Lays eggs in May and June.

Florida Distribution: Formerly occurred nearly statewide, but most (possibly all) populations in the Panhandle have been extirpated, as have many in more populated areas of the peninsula. Total state range has declined substantially in conjunction with habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation, as well as past human collection and possibly mortality on roads.

Eastern Indigo Snake

Drymarchon couperi

Range-wide Distribution: Florida and southern Georgia; formerly extended from southern South Carolina to southeastern Mississippi.

Conservation Status: Rare in most areas, though species has been recorded from many public lands statewide; however, whether most of these support viable populations is uncertain. Major threats are habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation, with associated highway mortality. Other threats include gassing of tortoise burrows for rattlesnakes, collection for pets, and deliberate persecution, all of which are illegal.

Protection and Management: Maintain natural conditions on inhabited landscapes; this will entail use of fire in longleaf pine and some other habitats. Reduce fragmentation of habitats, including by closing unnecessary roads. Avoid construction of roads through unfragmented habitat. Maintain gopher tortoise populations and dead stumps to provide natural subterranean refugia.

References: Ashton and Ashton 1988b, Conant and Collins 1991, Ernst and Barbour 1989, Georgia DNR 1999, Lazell 1989, Moler (ed.) 1992, Mount 1975, Tenant 1997.





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