FLORIDA KINGSNAKE
Lampropeltis floridana

Order: Squamata
Family: Colubridae
FNAI Ranks: G2/S2
U.S. Status: none
FL Status: none

Description: This is one of three Florida species of snakes (with *L. getula* and *L. meansi*) split from the formerly encompassing eastern kingsnake, *Lampropeltis getula* (Krysko et al. 2017); some believe that their prior recognition as subspecies continues to be more appropriate given the large hypothesized hybrid ("intergrade") zones. All are medium sized non-venomous snakes with a relatively small head and eyes, smooth (unkeeled) dorsal scales, and undivided anal scale; adults are typically 90–120 cm (3–4 ft), with males somewhat larger than females. *L. floridana* bears 34–78 narrow, light-colored crossbands and a degenerate lateral chain pattern; between the bands, dorsal scales lighten (from mostly black in hatchlings) variably with age, so that adults commonly become yellowish to speckled, rendering the crossbands indistinct. The belly is checkered with dark and light squares (Krysko and Judd 2006, Krysko et al. 2019).

Similar Species: In the northern peninsula, where it is hypothesized that this species hybridizes with *L. getula*, color patterns may resemble either or a combination of the two species; adult *L. getula* are typically black to dark brown with 19–32 cream-colored crossbands and a checkered ventral pattern. Rat snakes (*Pantherophis* species) in the peninsula reach sizes comparable to kingsnakes but are distinguished by having lightly keeled mid-dorsal scales, a divided anal scale, a somewhat larger head with more pronounced eyes, and a pattern dominated by yellow with brown strips or reddish orange with blotches or saddles. Young indigo snakes (*Drymarchon*) are almost entirely black and usually heavier in build. Coachwhips (*Masticophis flagellum*) and black racers (*Coluber constrictor*) are long, slender, and mostly patternless (tan and black, respectively). Mudsnakes (*Farancia abacura*) can be as large as kingsnakes and with black backs and smooth scales, but they normally have red bars (rarely white) on their venters and lower sides. The related rainbow snake (*F. erytrogramma*) has red stripes on its black back and sides.

Habitat: Although kngsnakes in the *L. getula* complex generally are upland species, they frequently occur near wetlands. *L. floridana* may utilize pine flatwoods, hardwood hammocks, cypress strands, wet prairies , disturbed forests dominated by Australian pine and melaleuca, canal banks in agricultural landscapes (especially sugarcane), and even salt marshes and mangrove swamps (Krysko et al. 2019), as well as some ruderal situations.

Seasonal Occurrence: The species occurs year-round in appropriate habitats, although there is potential for seasonal movements. Activity is typically reduced in colder months, more so in the northern part of the range.

Florida Distribution: *L. floridana* occurs patchily throughout much of peninsular Florida and south to Key Largo. A hypothesized zone of hybridization with the more northern *L. getula* spans a swath of counties situated roughly along a line from Levy on the Gulf Coast to St. Johns on the Atlantic Coast. Snakes in the this zone may resemble either species or be morphologically intermediate between the two (Krysko et al. 2017, 2019).

Range-wide Distribution: This species is restricted to Florida.

Conservation Status: All kingsnakes in the *L. getula* complex have declined in Florida since at least the mid-twentieth century, with resulting patchy populations replacing historically more widespread ones. Habitat loss (including wetland filling) and fragmentation are surely major factors, but others include road mortality, fire ant predation on eggs and hatchlings, pollution, overcollection for the commercial pet trade, use of biocides (pesticides, herbicides, and rodenticides), and potentially disease. Collection threat may have been ameliorated by successful captive breeding, but some collecting likely still occurs. The best remaining populations of *L. floridana* appear to be in the sugarcane fields at the southern end of Lake Okeechobee, where few roads exist and access to private land is limited (Krysko et al. 2019).

Protection and Management: Document all observations of this snake; photodocumentation is important given the presumed zone of hybridization (Krysko et al. 2017, 2019). Determine whether fire ants are a significant threat (and if so, control), and whether snake fungal disease affects this species. Road mortality is a known threat to this species (Godley et al. 2017); construction of new roads and

expansion of existing ones within areas supporting kingsnake populations should be avoided. Wildlife crossing corridors beneath existing roads may also facilitate safe movements. Legal protection limiting the collection of wild specimens of *L. floridana* is appropriate. Due to the rarity and declining population status of nearly all members of the *Lampropeltis getula* complex in Florida, consideration should be given to listing *L. floridana* at least at the state level (Krysko and Smith 2005, Krysko et al. 2017).

References: Godley et al. 2017, Krysko and Judd 2006, Krysko and Smith 2005, Krysko et al. 2017, Krysko et al. 2019.

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