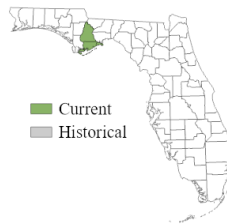


APALACHICOLA KINGSSNAKE

Lampropeltis meansi

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 split from the formerly encompassing eastern kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getula*); it can be debated whether recognition of *L. meansi* as a subspecies of *L. getula* would be more appropriate given the large zone of hybridization/intergradation with that taxon. Both are medium sized non-venomous snakes with a relatively small head and eyes, smooth (unkeeled) scales, and undivided anal scale; adults are typically 90–120 cm (3–4 ft), with males somewhat larger than females. The dorsal pattern of *L. meansi* is light in color, often yellowish to speckled. There are 25 or fewer crossbands, although these are not conspicuous in lighter individuals; when present, the light pigment is situated on the anterior half of crossband scales. Some individuals are striped, and others patternless. Hatchlings can be striped, patternless, or black with light crossbands. The belly may be somewhat checkered with dark and light squares, or all scales may be bicolored (Krysko et al. 2019).

Similar Species: In the area immediately surrounding its range, this species hybridizes with the eastern kingsnake, *L. getula*, which is typically black to dark brown with 19–32 cream-colored crossbands and a checkered ventral pattern. Rat snakes (*Pantherophis* species) in the region are distinguished by having lightly keeled middorsal scales, a divided anal scale, a somewhat larger head with more pronounced eyes, and a pattern dominated by gray or reddish orange. Young indigo snakes (*Drymarchon*) are almost entirely black and usually heavier in build.

Habitat: Although snakes in the eastern kingsnake complex, including *L. meansi*, are upland species, they often occur near wetlands. This species may utilize scrub, pine flatwoods, cypress stands, wet prairies, seepage bogs, stream margins, canal banks, and even estuaries (Krysko et al. 2019), as well as occur in ruderal situations.

Seasonal Occurrence: The species occurs year-round in appropriate habitats,

although there is potential for seasonal movements. Activity is greatly reduced in colder months.

Florida Distribution: *L. meansi* is endemic to a small region in the central Florida panhandle. It is restricted to the Eastern Apalachicola Lowlands between the Apalachicola and Ochlockonee rivers and south of Telogia Creek, Franklin and Liberty counties. Individuals of this taxon are also occasionally found in the southwestern Apalachicola Lowlands on the western side of the Apalachicola River. Morphological intermediates (including some formerly referred to *L. g. goini*) between *L. meansi* and *L. getula* are found mostly in the surrounding region from southern Gulf and Franklin counties to the west, north to Calhoun County, and east into northern Liberty (north of Telogia Creek), Gadsden, Leon, Wakulla, and Jefferson counties (Krysko et al. 2017).

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

Conservation Status: The species' range, excluding the hybrid zone with *L. getula*, is extremely small, limited chiefly to parts of two adjacent Florida counties. However, the vast majority of the range falls within state and federal conservation lands. All members of the *L. getula* complex in Florida are subject to collecting pressure for the pet trade, and this may have been a major cause of apparent decline for this taxon from the 1970s to 1990s. This threat may have been ameliorated by successful captive breeding, however, though some collecting likely still occurs. Because the species is not listed at either state or federal levels, this therefore represents a continuing threat, as does mortality of snakes from automobile strikes.

Protection and Management: Document all observations of this snake; photodocumentation is important given the presumed zones of hybridization (Krysko et al. 2017). Determine whether fire ants are a significant threat, and whether snake fungal disease affects this species. Legal protection prohibiting the collection of wild specimens of *L. meansi* is appropriate. The species should be considered for listing (probably as threatened) at state and/or federal levels.

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



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