

ATLANTIC SALT MARSH SNAKE

Nerodia clarkii taeniata



Order: Squamata
Family: Colubridae
FNAI Ranks: G4T1Q/S1
U.S. Status: Threatened
FL Status: Threatened

Description: A small to medium-sized (maximum 2 ft. = 61 cm) water snake marked by a pattern of dark brown and light stripes anteriorly but dark blotches on a pale olive ground color over much of the rest of the body. Scales strongly keeled and arranged in 21 - 23 rows; anal scale divided; double row of scales under tail. Belly dark with a central row of cream to yellow spots. Pupil round; no facial pit (small opening) between eye and nostril.

Similar Species: Garter and ribbon snakes (*Thamnophis*), which occur chiefly in terrestrial and freshwater situations, have light stripes on a dark background for the full length of the body; an undivided anal scale; and usually a plain, light belly that may have black spots. The freshwater Florida water snake (*Nerodia fasciata pictiventris*) has dark crossbands or saddles but no stripes, a dark line from eye to angle of jaw, and dark, wormlike markings across a light belly. Mangrove salt marsh snake (*N. c. compressicauda*), along both coasts below Volusia and Citrus counties, is blotched or plain rather than striped. Some water snakes with striped and blotched patterns similar to *N. c. taeniata* occur along the Gulf coast and are presumed to be hybrids between the related Gulf salt marsh snake (*N. c. clarkii*) and Florida water snake. Venomous cottonmouth (*Agkistrodon piscivorus*) has heavy body and large, triangular head, white-bordered dark stripe through eye, vertical pupils, facial pit between each eye and nostril, and single row of scales below tail.

Habitat: Estuarine: coastal salt marshes, mangrove swamps, tidal creeks, pools, and ditches.

Seasonal Occurrence: Active spring to fall, more easily observed at night during low tides. Gives birth to live young in summer and early fall.

Florida Distribution: Restricted to coastal Volusia County; intergrades with mangrove salt marsh snake (*N. c. compressicauda*) in Brevard and Indian River

Atlantic Salt Marsh Snake

Nerodia clarkii taeniata

counties.

Range-wide Distribution: Same as Florida distribution. Other subspecies of salt marsh snake extend from south of Volusia County, around the Florida peninsula, west along the Gulf coast to Texas, and to northern Cuba.

Conservation Status: Some habitat is within Canaveral National Seashore, but much has been lost or altered.

Protection and Management: Manage salt marshes, mangrove swamps, and tidal creeks and rivers of Volusia County to prevent disturbances.

References: Ashton and Ashton 1988b, Conant and Collins 1991, Moler (ed.) 1992, Tenant 1997.



© Steven P. Christman