

The Eastern Foxsnake



Description

The Eastern Foxsnake is Ontario's third largest snake and the largest snake in the Georgian Bay area. Adults range between 90 and 150 cm in length. Foxsnakes are yellowish-brown with large dark brown blotches on the back and smaller blotches along the sides. The head may be reddish-brown in colour. The belly has a checkerboard pattern.

A Species at Risk

Foxsnakes are considered threatened due to habitat loss from shoreline cottage development, mortality on roads and human persecution. Killbear is helping to protect this species by protecting their habitat, conducting scientific research and educating the public.

Where Are They?

In eastern Georgian Bay foxsnakes occupy shorelines, marshes and islands and are rarely found far from water. Seventy percent of the global range of eastern foxsnakes is in Ontario. Remnant populations also exist in northern Ohio and eastern Michigan.

Harmless Habit

The Eastern foxsnake is a very secretive and docile snake. When it feels threatened, it may vibrate its tail. Although foxsnakes do not have a rattle, if the vibrating tail hits dry leaves it can sound like a rattlesnake. This behaviour is meant to startle and scare away any threats. Unfortunately this has led to uninformed people killing this harmless snake. - It is illegal to kill any species at risk - including rattlesnakes.



Foxsnake Range Map



A Foxsnake's Life

The Eastern foxsnake is a constrictor, feeding mainly on small rodents, birds and their eggs. The snake grabs and holds its prey with its mouth and then squeezes its prey by coiling around its body. Predators include red shouldered hawks and fishers - a large member of the weasel family.

Foxsnakes can climb trees but usually stay on the ground. They are good swimmers and can easily

swim a couple of kilometres over open water.

Foxsnakes hibernate communally during the winter (October - April). They usually hibernate in rock piles and rotted tree root cavities. Foxsnakes return to the same spot for hibernation every year. Gartersnakes and watersnakes may share these hibernation sites.

Foxsnakes breed in mid-June. In July, females lay 7-20 oval shaped eggs in rotting stumps, or leaf piles. The eggs hatch in late August.



Confusing Species

People often confuse watersnakes with foxsnakes because they are both large snakes that spend a lot of time near water. If the snake is swimming you will quickly be able to tell the difference. Foxsnakes float high on the water and they likely cannot dive below the surface. Watersnakes usually swim with just their head

above water. If approached, watersnakes will dive underwater and swim away.



Watersnake swimming



Foxsnake swimming

Research at Killbear

As part of a multi-year research program at Killbear, foxsnakes were captured, measured, weighed and implanted with a microchip so they could be identified if recaptured. Over 20 foxsnakes were implanted with radio-transmitters that allowed researchers to track their day-to-day movements. The study was initiated to ensure that construction of the new visitor centre did not adversely affect foxsnakes or their critical habitat.



Research Results

- Researchers have confirmed numerous hibernation sites in and around Killbear. Most of the hibernation sites are on islands.
- Our foxsnakes are highly mobile (especially during mating season) and move an average of 20 km per season. One snake moved 36 km during the active season!
- Both males and females will mate with multiple partners during mating season. Males may engage in ritual combat to gain access to females. One wrestling match lasted over 1 hour!
- It appears that foxsnakes that spend time on the mainland are in much greater danger of being killed by human influences (cars, construction, dogs, and people) than are foxsnakes that live on the islands.

How You Can Help

- Brake for snakes
- Leave shorelines natural
- Learn about snakes and tell your friends
- Report any sightings
- Observe from a distance, do not disturb snakes that you encounter



Killbear

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