

Native Vermont Reptiles

Part 1

Snakes and Lizards



Keeled scales have a ridge down the middle of the scale



Smooth scales do not have a ridge down the middle of the scale

Vermont has eleven native species of snakes and one native species of lizard. Their exact areas of distribution within the state are still being determined. All of our snakes and lizards are non-venomous, with the exception of the Timber Rattlesnake. However, the Timber Rattlesnake is non-aggressive with a very limited distribution in Western Rutland County only. In order for these species to survive and flourish, they need our help. One way that you can help is to report the snakes and lizards that you come across in the state. Include in your report as much detail as you can on the appearance and location of the animal, also include the date of the sighting, your name, and how to contact you. Photographs are ideal, but not necessary. When attempting to identify a particular species, check at least three different field markings so that you can be sure of what it is. Keep in mind that all the species below are more brightly colored and have a more defined pattern after a recent shedding. To contribute a report, you may use our website (vtherpatlas.org) or contact Jim Andrews directly at jandrews@vtherpatlas.org.

Common Five-lined Skink (*Plestiodon fasciatus*)

Common Gartersnake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*)



When young, the skink has five lengthwise stripes on a black background. The tail is bright blue. The adult females have the same pattern, but it is less distinct, and they lose the blue on the tail. The adult males are dull brown all over. When they are breeding the males have a red throat and sometimes a red face. The adult skink ranges between 6-8 inches in length. It inhabits rock slides, cliffs, areas near ledges, open woods, old buildings, and is often found near water. The Common Five-lined Skink is endangered in Vermont.



The gartersnake has three length-wise yellowish stripes, one on the center of the back and one on each side. The side stripes are low on the sides (scale rows 2 and 3). Portions of the stripes can be missing. The background color can be green, black, brown, or anywhere in between. A checkerboard pattern may be visible on the sides between the stripes. The head is dark olive green with a yellow upper lip. The tail is about 1/5 of the total length. Adults are usually 2-3 feet long, with keeled scales. They can be found in a wide variety of rural habitats often near water.



DeKay's Brownsnake (*Storeria dekayi*)

North American Racer (*Coluber constrictor*)



DeKay's Brownsnakes are always brown or grayish brown. They have a wide light-brown stripe down the center of the back. On each side of the stripe, there are black spots that are sometimes in the form of a checkerboard pattern. Their underside is white or tan. They have small black diagonal lines on the neck that are angled back and down from the eye. Adults are usually about 1 foot long with keeled scales. They can be found in overgrown wet meadows and rocky woods at low elevations. When very small, they have a white ring around their neck that extends forward and under the eyes.



The racer is a slender snake that has a black body with a satin sheen. The underside is a solid white or gray. Sometimes they show an iridescent blue on either side of the belly. They have a tan nose, white under chin, and a strong eyebrow ridge. As adults they are 4-6 feet long and have smooth scales. They inhabit open pastures, power lines, and meadows, near rocky ridges. When they are young, they look similar to milksnakes, but they do not have the white "Y" on the back of the head that milksnakes have. The racer is very fast and quite nervous. The North American Racer is threatened in Vermont.



Eastern Ratsnake (*Pantherophis alleghaniensis*)

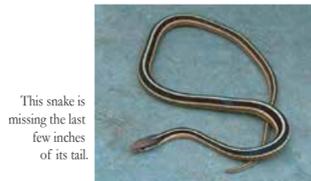
Eastern Ribbonsnake (*Thamnophis saurita*)



The Eastern Ratsnake is black, but usually shows remnants of its juvenile pattern. Unlike the racer, the ratsnake has a pattern on its underside. It is a black and white checkerboard on the front half, and then turns to a solid dark tone towards the tail. The ratsnake has weakly keeled scales. Adults are 5-6 feet long, and like old buildings, fields, and edges near rocky areas and ledges. When a juvenile, the ratsnake has a pattern similar to the milksnake, but it does not have the white "Y" on the back of the head that milksnakes have. In addition, the blotches on the young ratsnake have corners so that they are more "X" shaped, rather than round. The Eastern Ratsnake is threatened in Vermont.



The ribbonsnake has three yellow, length-wise stripes on a black background. A checkerboard pattern is rarely visible between the stripes. The stripes are well defined and higher on the sides than in the gartersnake (scale rows 3 and 4). The head is dark reddish-brown over a white upper lip. The ribbonsnake is more slender than the gartersnake. About 1/4-1/3 of its total length is comprised of the tail. Adults are 2-3 feet long, have keeled scales, and can be found in pastures, open woods, and rocky areas. They are most always near water. The Eastern Ribbonsnake is a species of special concern in Vermont.



Eastern Milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum*)

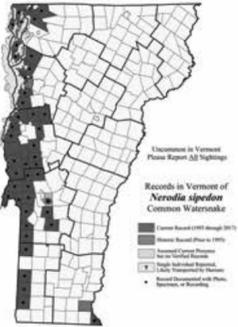
Common Watersnake (*Nerodia sipedon*)



The milksnake is also known locally as the spotted or checkered adder, but is not actually an adder. The milksnake has reddish brown blotches outlined in black. They become darker with age. They also have a white "Y" on the back of their head. The milksnake's underside has a white and black checkerboard pattern. Adult milksnakes are 2-3 feet long, have smooth scales, and inhabit old fields, old buildings, stone walls, and ledges.



When young, the watersnake has reddish-brown blotches on a cream background. They darken with age to almost solid black with dark brown blotches. Their underside is white (or yellow) and black with red crescents. Adult watersnakes are thick snakes that are usually 3-4 feet long with heavily keeled scales. They inhabit lowland shallow wetlands with emergent vegetation and nearby rocks.



Red-bellied Snake (*Storeria occipitomaculata*)

Ring-necked Snake (*Diadophis punctatus*)



Red-bellied Snakes come in two colors, either brown or dark gray. They have three off-white spots, one on the back of the neck and one on each side of the neck. Sometimes the spots can be joined into a ring. Their underside is red. Adults are usually about 1 foot long, have keeled scales, and inhabit woodlands with small openings and lots of cover. They are quite common, but also very secretive.



The Ring-necked Snake has a slender body and is a blue gray color. It has a yellow (or orange) underside and a yellow (or orange) ring around its neck. The ring is usually outlined in black. Adult Ring-necked Snakes are between 1-2 feet long, they have smooth scales, and they are found in warm, exposed areas often near water with abundant bark, log, or rock cover.



Smooth Greensnake (*Ophedryx vernalis*)

Timber Rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*)



True to its name, the Smooth Greensnake has smooth scales and is solid green. When it is dead, it turns blue. Adults can grow to be 2 feet long, and they are found in beaver meadows, overgrown fields, pastures, and sedge meadows.



The Timber Rattlesnake, Vermont's only venomous snake, has black "W" shaped cross bands on a tan background. The rattle on the end of the tail is a yellowish tan color. They may have a yellow head, in which case they would have a brightly patterned body, or they may have a black head, in which case they would have a darker patterned body. Adult rattlesnakes are thick snakes that are usually 2-4 feet in length, with heavily keeled scales. They inhabit rock slides, ledges, and nearby woodlands. The Timber Rattlesnake is endangered in Vermont.

