

Similar Species

Bullsnakes are often confused with fox snakes and milksnakes, all of which are also frequently, and incorrectly, referred to as “pine snakes”.

Eastern milksnake: Note the rounded snout and “Y” or “V” shaped marking on top of the head. Milk snakes have isolated saddle-shaped blotches that are rusty brown or reddish and outlined with a dark border. These are often over-laid on a grayish background.



Western foxsnake: Note the lack of heavy patterning on the head of adults, which is yellowish/brown or copper/brown in coloration. Also note the rounded snout. Fox snakes have isolated saddle-shaped blotches that are dark brown or black over a yellow/brown background. Unlike milk snakes, these blotches are not outlined with a dark border.



Bullsnakes, fox snakes and milk snakes will mimic rattlesnakes by shaking the tip of their tail when threatened. For this reason, they are all often mistaken for a venomous species, which they are not.

For More Information:

Online:

The Amphibians and Reptiles of La Crosse, WI
www.angelfire.com/ab6/jnjkapfer/index.htm

Snakes of Wisconsin, WDNR
<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/herps/snakes/>

Books:

Christoffel, R., R. Hay, R. Paloski and L. Ramirez. 2008. *Snakes of Wisconsin*. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Bureau of Endangered Resources. Pub-ER-100 08. Available for purchase from the DNR.

Ernst, C.H., and E.M. Ernst. 2003. *Snakes of the United States and Canada*. Smithsonian Books, Washington.

Harding, J.H. 1997. *Amphibians and Reptiles of the Great Lakes Region*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI.

Oldfield, B. and J.J. Moriarty. 1994. *Amphibians and Reptiles Native to Minnesota*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN.

Vogt, R.C. 1981. *The Natural History of Amphibians and Reptiles of Wisconsin*. Milwaukee Public Museum, Milwaukee, WI. Out of Print, but available from library.



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Developed by J.M. Kapfer, R. Hay, and R.A. Paloski.
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Bullsnake Sightings Wanted!

Bullsnake Sighting Initiative (WDNR)

Please help us learn more about the distribution of this rare species in Wisconsin.



Bullsnakes are non-venomous, constricting rodent predators, typically associated with prairies, open bluff sides, or savannah habitats. The loss of such habitat has caused bullsnake populations to decline significantly over the past several decades.

Now uncommon throughout much of the Upper Midwest, bullsnakes are listed as a Protected Wild Animal by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Despite this listing, however, little is known about the bullsnake's true distribution and status within Wisconsin.

In an attempt to conserve this species, a standardized protocol has been developed that makes use of the state's most valuable tool... its citizens. This protocol outlines a means by which the general public can report bullsnake sightings. This information will help resource managers make sound decisions regarding bullsnake conservation.



How to Submit Bullsnake Sightings

Preferred Method:

Sightings may be submitted online at:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/forms/bullsnakeobs.asp>

Alternative Method:

In lieu of electronic sighting submission, designated bullsnake sighting forms can be acquired from local nature centers, or from the address below, and sent to:

Department of Natural Resources
Bureau of Endangered Resources
P.O. Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707

Photographic evidence of the snake is required for sightings to be considered valid.

Bullsnake Possession Disclaimer:

Bullsnares are a Protected Species in Wisconsin, making it illegal for individuals to possess them without proper permits from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). For documentation purposes, we recommend that snakes be photographed and not handled. They may not be removed from the point of observation or possessed.



Information Required for Online Sighting Submission

- **Name of Observer and Contact Info (phone, address, and email if available) ***
- **Date and Time of Observation***
- **Weather Conditions**
- **Location of Observation** (Township, range and section information can be acquired from a Wisconsin Atlas or Gazetteer.)
 - County *
 - Nearest City or Town*
 - Township Name*
 - Section
 - On Private or Public Land?
(If on private land, name of property owner. If on public land, name of the property (ie, name of State Natural Area, County Park, etc.) where observation was made.)
 - Name of nearest road
 - Approximate distance to nearest intersection, and name of both roads
 - GPS coordinates (if available)
- **General Description of Dominant Habitat Where Sighting Occurred** (desirable, but not required)
- **Photographic Evidence***
 - Non-photographic evidence accepted, but observation will only be considered anecdotal.
 - Photos should be taken as close as possible to test subject, and be of good quality.
 - If possible, submit several photos to insure proper identification.
- **Number of Photos Submitted***

*** Required Information**

Additional Information to Consider

Bullsnares are mostly found in open canopy upland habitats with dry, sandy soils (such as prairies, oak savannas, pastures, and meadows). Often these are located adjacently to open bluff faces with exposed limestone outcroppings.

Because a primary food source of bullsnares is rodents, they are often found in agricultural settings.

Although unverified reports of bullsnares have been received from many regions in the state, they are believed to be most common in the south-central, south-western, and western portions of the state.

Currently Known Bullsnake Distribution in Wisconsin



Bullsnake Physical Description

Bullsnares are the largest snake species native to the Upper Midwest, and can exceed 74 inches in length. Their coloration is highly variable, with the body often having three somewhat distinct patterns along its length. The head and neck is usually dominated by black mottling on white or tan. The middle section supports brown blotches (large and prominent on the back and smaller and less defined on the sides) on a yellowish background. The tail end is often distinctly ringed in black or dark brown on yellow or gold. The head is thicker and more pointed than most snakes. The scales below the eyes are often heavily barred with black.