

Reptiles and Amphibians

Reptiles and amphibians, collectively known as “herptiles” or “herps” for short, are cold-blooded animals unlike the warm-blooded mammals and birds. The reptiles include snakes, lizards and turtles; amphibians include frogs and salamanders. Most snakes, all lizards and some turtles prefer to live on land. Most turtles prefer a life in or near water. However, all amphibians must lay their eggs in water or very damp habitats. Therefore, wetlands—from marshes, swamps and moist woodlands to lakes, streams, ponds and temporary pools—are essential to the survival of amphibians. Many reptiles, on the other hand, are not as dependent on wetlands as are the amphibians. Because the thick, hard scales which cover reptilian bodies provide protection from drying air and sun, most Wisconsin snakes and lizards live far from water. Still, aquatic turtles and water snakes are very dependent on wetlands.

Amphibians are also different from reptiles in that they go through a metamorphosis, or change in body shape. Just think about frogs in their early tadpole stage. Lastly, all Wisconsin herptiles are silent creatures except for the unique vocalizations of the frogs. Who has not appreciated hearing the jingling of spring peepers or the trilling of toads on a warm spring night?

Herps are very beneficial to people. Several kinds of snakes, for instance, consume large quantities of rodents each year. Only two, fairly rare kinds of snakes are poisonous: the timber rattlesnake found in the rugged bluff country along the Mississippi and Lower Wisconsin Rivers, and the Massasauga, a shy, retiring rattler of the swamps. Frogs and toads also do their best to reduce the supply of insects including mosquitoes, black flies, and other pesky flying insects. As with birds and mammals, herps are important in their own right. Both reptiles and amphibians

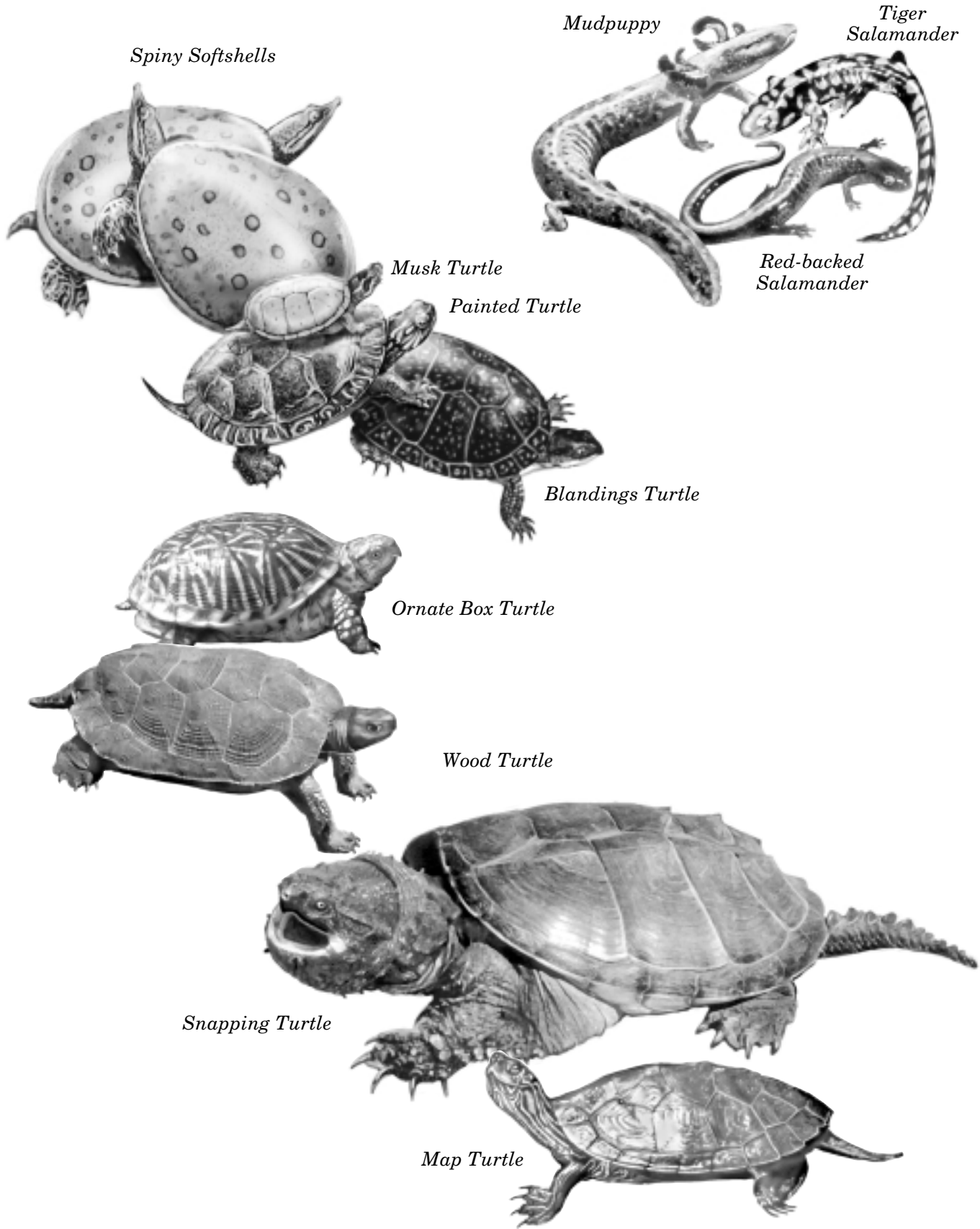
serve as food for other, larger animals, so all play a critical role in the circle of life and the cycles of nature.

Landowners don't often think of attracting reptiles or amphibians to their property. These cold-blooded, “slimy” or “scaly” creatures just don't seem to have the aesthetic appeal that the “warm fuzzy” birds and mammals have. Nevertheless, since this group of animals plays an invaluable role in the ecological scheme of things on the Wisconsin landscape, you may want to plan some projects to encourage their presence. You could, for instance, restore a wetland on your property where one once existed and may have been filled in or plowed under. Or, consider improving your woodland by leaving downed timber on the woodland floor, especially in moist lowland woods where salamanders and some frogs would benefit. Your property's biodiversity and overall natural health will be greatly increased.

Read more about reptiles and amphibians in *Natural History of Amphibians and Reptiles in Wisconsin* by Richard Carl Vogt, published 1981 by the Milwaukee Public Museum and Friends of the Museum.

Green frog

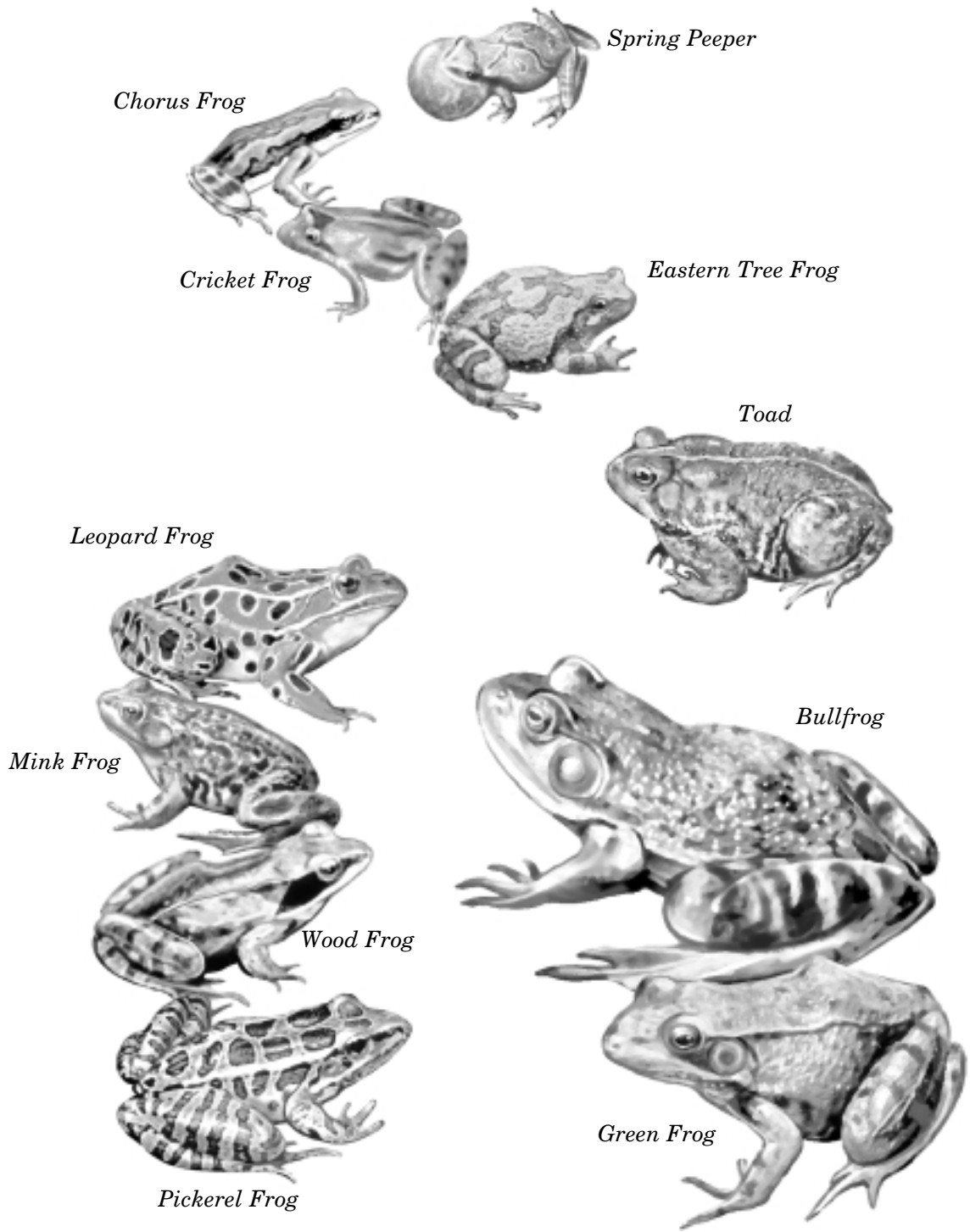


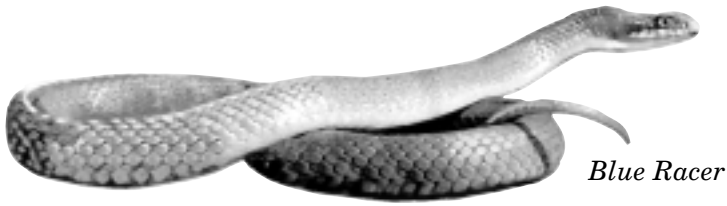


| Turtles | Food | Habitat | Shelter | Distribution |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| Blandings Turtle | Prefers crayfish, insects, earthworms, vegetation, berries | Shallow, weedy bays of rivers, lakes and marshes | Seeks shelter inside shell or on marsh bottom or in submerged vegetation | Statewide except for six north-central counties, THREATENED |
| Ornate Box Turtle | Insects, cactus and other succulent plants, berries | Dry, sandy floodplain, prairies adjacent to the lower Wisconsin River | Hibernates in self-excavated or mammal burrows; hides under bushes or in burrows | Southwest and south-central, ENDANGERED |
| Map Turtles (3 kinds) | Fish, insects, snails | Lakes, rivers with slow to moderate current | Hide in deep areas under sunken logs, occasionally in aquatic vegetation; hibernate behind logs and rocks on riverbottom | Mostly restricted to south-central, southwest and west |
| Musk Turtle | Insects, fish, carrion in water | River backwaters and lakes | Retreats to bottom or hides in dense submerged vegetation | Southern one-fourth and along Mississippi from La Crosse south |
| Painted Turtle (2 sub-species) | Aquatic vegetation, snails, crayfish, insects, fish, carrion, tadpoles | Ponds, shallow lakes, and slow moving rivers | Burrows or lays on bottom during winter; hides in dense submergent vegetation | Statewide |
| Snapping Turtle | Insects, crayfish, mollusks, worms, leeches, fish, frogs, birds, aquatic plants | Lakes, rivers, creeks, ponds and marshes | Stays on muddy bottoms of ponds in dense aquatic vegetation | Statewide |
| Soft-shelled Turtles (2 kinds, Spiny is most common) | Fish, crayfish, aquatic insect larvae | Primarily rivers, large lakes and reservoirs | Hide in sandy or muddy bottoms; nest near waters edge | Primarily western two-thirds, abundant in the Black, Chippewa, Mississippi, and Wisconsin rivers |
| Wood Turtle | Insects, earthworms, berries, vegetation | On land or water near fast moving streams in forested areas | Hibernates under cut banks or in deeper pools with at least moderate current | Primarily northern two-thirds, THREATENED |

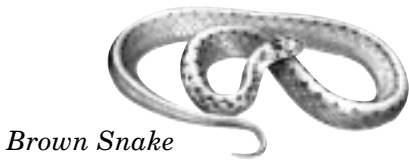
| Salamanders | Food | Habitat | Shelter | Distribution |
|-----------------------|---|--|---|--|
| Mudpuppy | Worms, and other aquatic invertebrates, insects, small fish | Bottoms of rivers and lakes during every stage of life cycle | Hides amongst rocks on bottom of rivers and lakes | Statewide |
| Red-backed Salamander | Small insects and insect larvae | Damp litter and rotted logs in woodlands, sphagnum bogs | Hides under logs and leaf litter, in sphagnum moss or under ground | Northern half |
| Tiger Salamander | Earthworms, cricket nymphs, grasshoppers, moths, flies, spiders, beetles, cicadas | Breeds in prairie ponds, marshes, kettle potholes, lakes, woodland ponds, farm ponds | Spends much of the year underground in woodlands; migrates to breed on first rainy nights associated with frost-out | Central, southeastern and northwestern |

| Frogs | Food | Habitat | Shelter | Distribution |
|------------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| Bullfrog | Insects, small fish, other frogs, small turtles | Permanent bodies of water | Hides in shoreline vegetation or in submerged vegetation | Statewide but patchy |
| Western Chorus Frog | Mites, midges, caterpillars, spiders, beetles, ants, spiders | Prairies, marshes, riverbottom forests, woodland pools near shallow or temporary water or semi-open areas | Hides under vegetation, climbs on shrubs and grasses; hibernates under rocks, logs and ground litter | Statewide |
| Blanchards Cricket Frog | Small insects, invertebrates | In or near permanent water with submerged plants and low, gradient shorelines with low, sparse vegetation | Leaps in zigzag pattern to escape predators; rapidly jumps into water and then back to land; may hide under submerged vegetation | Extreme southwest, ENDANGERED |
| Green Frog | Insects, invertebrates | All types of permanent water; prefers tall shoreline vegetation, including brush | Near waters edge riparian areas; hides in shoreline vegetation or in debris on lake bed | Statewide |
| Northern Leopard Frog | Insects, invertebrates | Breeding: lakes, streams, rivers, ponds; Foraging: fields and wet prairies | Often found far from standing water during the summer; hibernates under water | Statewide |
| Mink Frog | Insects, invertebrates | Lives at or near the edges of bogs associated with lakes and streams | Hides under sphagnum mats or in emergent vegetation; flees across the water surface and dives | Northern third to half |
| Pickerel Frog | Insects, invertebrates | Cool, clear waters of spring-fed lakes and streams | Takes shelter in shoreline vegetation and in the water; often hides in water cress; breeds in warmer adjacent ponds or backwaters | Scattered statewide except extreme north-central counties |
| Spring Peeper | Small insects | Wooded areas with temporary or semi-permanent ponds, swamps and marshes | Hides under damp leaf litter, under logs and bark | Statewide |
| Eastern American Toad | Earthworms, mealworms, garden insects | A variety of habitats wherever there are insects, moisture and shallow waters for breeding | Breeds in water anywhere; burrows under leaf litter, under logs or in loose soil | Statewide |
| Eastern Treefrog Copes Treefrog | Small insects, invertebrates | Eastern: forest interior and edges; Copes: oak savannas, woodland or brushy field edges | Eastern: hides in trees and under bark; Copes: hides on underside of leaves in brush or in leaf litter; both breed in temporary and permanent ponds | Statewide |
| Wood Frog | Insects | Lowland hardwood forests and other large tracts of moist woods | Hides among forest floor leaf litter | Nearly statewide except for extreme south central counties |

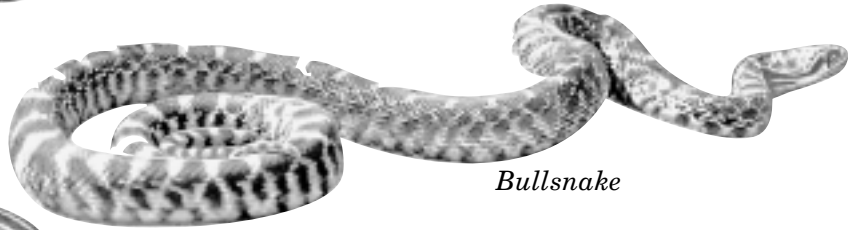




Blue Racer



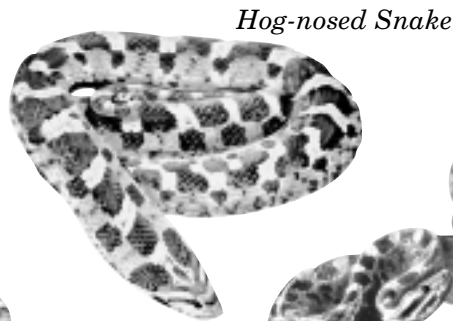
Brown Snake



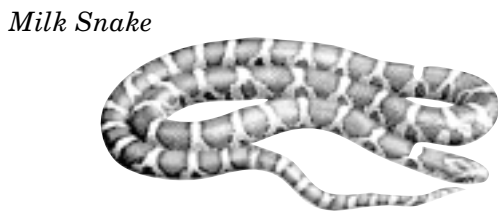
Bulls snake



Garter Snake



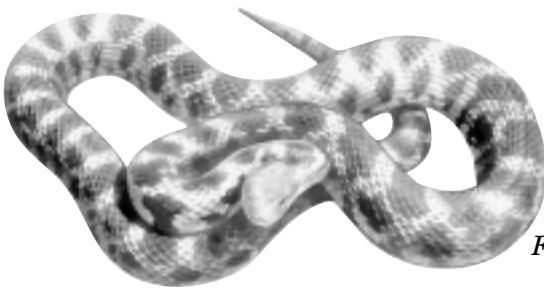
Hog-nosed Snake



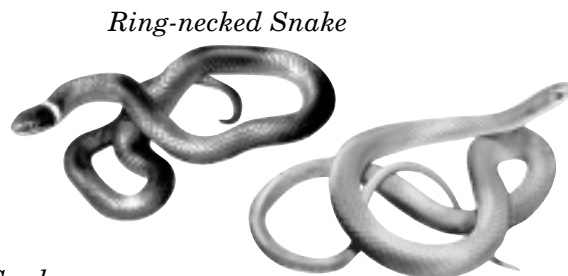
Milk Snake



Massasauga



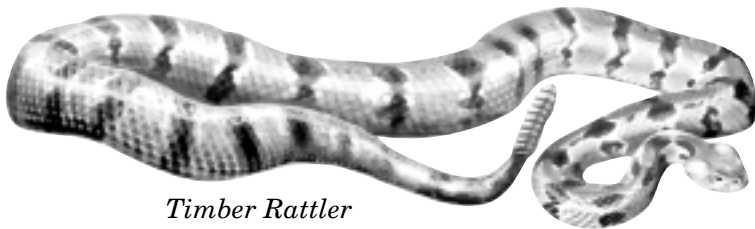
Fox Snake



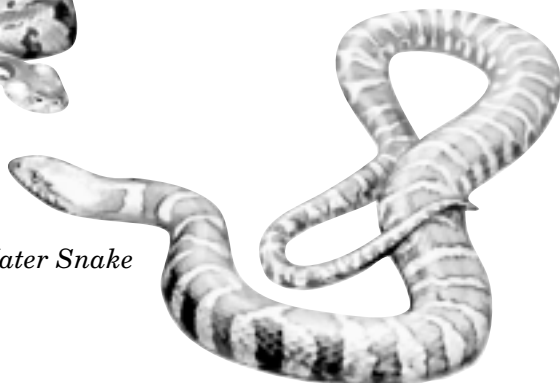
Ring-necked Snake



Smooth Green Snake



Timber Rattler

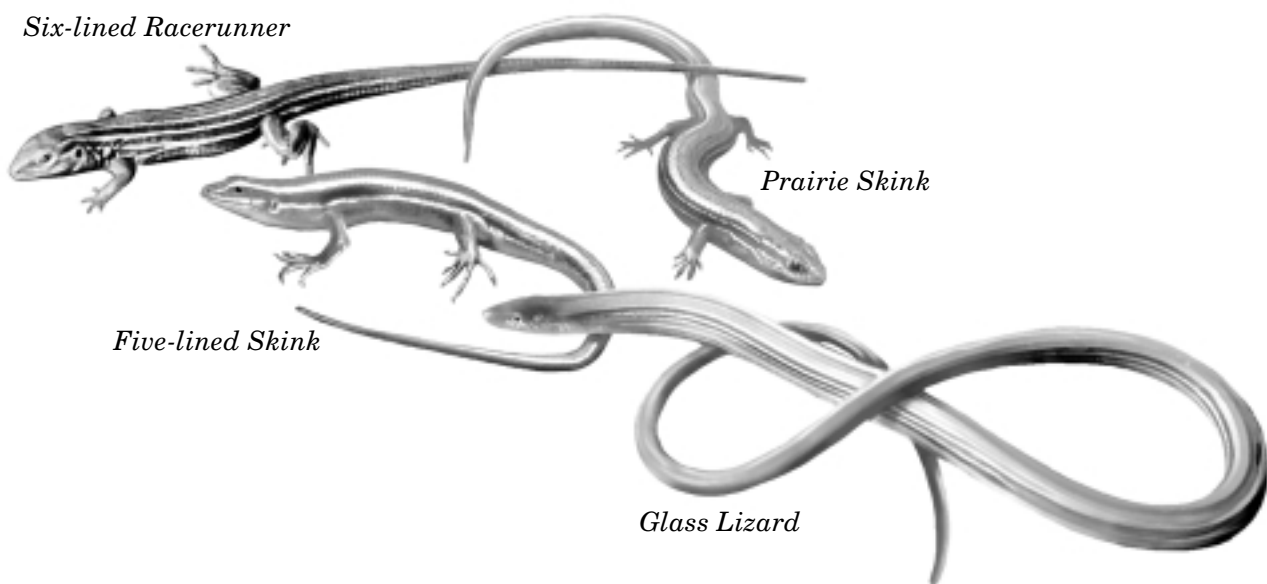


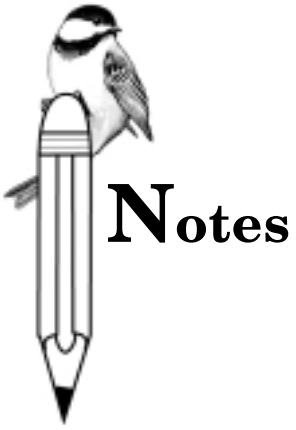
Northern Water Snake

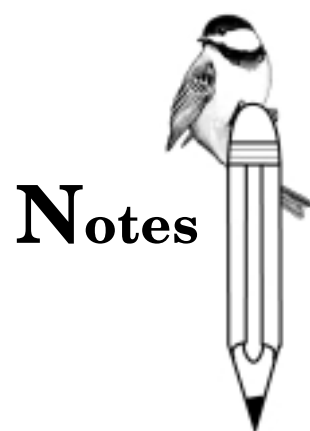
| Snakes | Food | Habitat | Shelter | Distribution |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| Blue Racer | Racerunners and other lizards, snakes, frogs, insects, small birds, rodents | Open fields, open oak woodlands, dry rocky southwest facing slopes, dry prairies, oak savannas | Seeks shelter under flat rocks or in limestone crevasses, or in mammal burrows | Southern half |
| Brown Snakes (2 kinds, Red-bellied and Northern are both common) | Earthworms, small insects, invertebrates | Dry to slightly moist areas such as surface leaves on open woodland floors, southern lowland hardwood forest, marshes, old fields, under rubbish or vacant lots | Hibernate in deserted anthills, rock crevasses and building foundations | Statewide |
| Bullsnake | Mostly rodents, sometimes ground nesting birds and eggs | Loose sandy soil in dry prairies, oak savannas, pine barrens, and oak openings; south and west slopes in bluffs along Wisconsin and Mississippi rivers | Hibernates in deep rock fissures on SW exposed hills, burrows of pocket gophers or ground squirrels; seeks summer shelter in dense ground cover, flat rocks and mammal burrows | Southwest and West |
| Garter Snakes (5 kinds, Eastern is most common) | Frogs, insects, salamanders, earthworms, small fish, small mammals | Lake, creek and river margins, grassy fields, sedge meadows, bogs, wet prairies and hillsides | Hides underground, under logs, in foundations and under a variety of litter | Statewide for Eastern Garter Snake only |
| Eastern Hog-nosed Snake | Toads, frogs, large insects | Open fields, hillsides, especially open sandy areas, also southern lowland hardwood forest near rivers during summer months | Seeks shelter in its own burrows which it makes in sand or else seeks shelter in abandoned rodent burrows | Statewide except for northcentral counties |
| Massasauga Rattlesnake | Small rodents, small birds, frogs | Marshy areas, bogs, lowland hardwood forests and more open swamps with sunny, dry open fields nearby | Hibernates in mammal burrows, especially crayfish burrows | West and West-central, ENDANGERED |
| Milk Snake | Mostly rodents, often other snakes, including rattlesnakes | Moist forest edges near open woods and grasslands; also woodlots and pastures near streams and rivers | Hibernates in foundations or other buried rock structures; found under boards and logs in summer | Southern two-thirds |
| Fox Snake | Mostly small rodents, sometimes small birds | Marshes, farmlands, open moist woodlands, southerly exposed slopes of bluffs | Found in trees and hide in the holes of oak and hickory; hibernates underground in natural rock structures, rock-lined dug wells and deep rock foundations; in summer, often hides under boards and pieces of metal | Statewide |

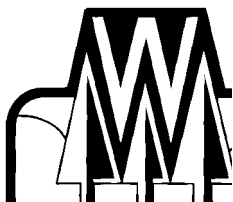
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|---|--|---|--|---|
| Northern Ring-necked Snake Prairie Ring-necked Snake | Small salamanders, earthworms, small snakes, lizards | Northern: Moist deciduous forests; Prairie: Southwest facing bluffsides along Wisconsin and Mississippi rivers | Both: Hide under rocks, bark, fallen trees; Northern: hides in logs or leaf litter by day, forages at night; Prairie: by day, basks on dry prairie hillsides | Northern: northern third Prairie: southwest |
| Smooth Green Snake | Insects, earthworms, small invertebrates | Open grassy fields and grassy woodlots | Found under logs or metal | Mostly statewide, except along extreme western counties and southwest |
| Timber Rattlesnake | Primarily rodents and other small mammals | Rocky, open or wooded hillsides and nearby fields and lowlands, oak woodlands | Found along bluffs associated with the Mississippi and Wisconsin rivers | West and southwest |
| Northern Water Snake Queen Water Snake | Frogs, salamanders, fish, crayfish, larger invertebrates | Borders of creeks, rivers and lakes | Takes refuge in the water | Northern: statewide RESTRICTED Queen: extreme southeast ENDANGERED |

| Lizards | Food | Habitat | Shelter | Distribution |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| Western Slender Glass Lizard | Insects, small lizards, small snakes, bird eggs | Open meadows, dry mesic prairie, oak savanna with sandy soils | Hides in sedge clumps and animal burrows | West and central, ENDANGERED |
| Six-lined Racerunner | Insects, small invertebrates | Dry sandy areas in open fields and on rocky hillsides | Hides in brush, grass clumps, and its own burrows | Southwest |
| Five-lined Skink Northern Prairie Skink | Insects, small invertebrates | Dry, sandy areas in open fields and oak and pine barrens | Hides in stumps, rotting logs, slab and sawdust piles; may climb trees and low brush to forage and escape predator | Prairie: northwest Five-lined: central and northeast |









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