



plains garter snake

Thamnophis radix

Kingdom: Animalia
 Division/Phylum: Chordata - vertebrates
 Class: Reptilia
 Order: Squamata
 Family: Colubridae

FEATURES

The plains garter snake averages 15 to 28 inches in length. The name "garter snake" comes from the striped appearance of the body, similar to that of the garters that were once commonly used to support men's socks. Three longitudinal stripes are found on the body with black spots between the stripes and below each side stripe. The stripe in the center of the back is yellow or orange while those on the sides are yellow-gray. The lips have black bars, and the gray-green belly has two rows of black spots. The back is brown or green. The scales are keeled (ridged).

BEHAVIORS

The plains garter snake lives in river valleys, prairie ponds, sloughs, meadows and pastures. It was once common in vacant lots in cities. Active in the day, this snake may be seen basking in the sun. It takes shelter under objects on the ground. It is believed to overwinter in abandoned rodent burrows. When alarmed, the plains garter snake may flatten its body and release fecal matter and an unpleasant musk from glands at the base of the tail. Mating occurs in the spring. The female gives birth to from

10 to 30 young in late summer, the number depending on her size and age. The plains garter snake eats frogs, toads, salamanders, fishes, tadpoles, earthworms, leeches, small mammals and birds.

HABITATS

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> bottomland forests | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> rivers & streams |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> lakes, ponds & reservoirs | <input type="checkbox"/> swamps |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lake Michigan | <input type="checkbox"/> temp water supplies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> marshes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> wet prairies & fens |
| <input type="checkbox"/> peatlands | |

ILLINOIS STATUS

- | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> common | <input type="checkbox"/> endangered | <input type="checkbox"/> threatened |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> native | <input type="checkbox"/> exotic | |

ILLINOIS RANGE

northern 1/2

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 1999. *Biodiversity of Illinois, Volume I: Aquatic Habitats* CD-ROM.