



plainbelly water snake

Nerodia erythrogaster

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

FEATURES

Two subspecies of the plainbelly water snake are found in Illinois, the yellowbelly water snake and the copperbelly water snake. The yellowbelly water snake averages 30 to 48 inches in length, has a back which is gray or greenish gray and is usually without markings, a yellow belly with a touch of orange and keeled (ridged) scales. The copperbelly water snake averages 30 to 48 inches in length, has a dark, sometimes black back, a red or orange-red belly and keeled (ridged) scales.

BEHAVIORS

The plainbelly water snake may be found in the southern one-third of Illinois and the Illinois River valley south of Peoria. This reptile lives in river bottoms, swamps, marshes, edges of ponds and lakes. The plainbelly water snake is aquatic. It may be seen basking on logs in water or along the shoreline. It may flatten its body when disturbed and/or release large amounts of nasty-smelling musk from glands at the base of the tail. Mating season occurs in April and May. Eggs are retained inside the female for development. Young are born alive in late summer, the number produced varying directly with the size of the female snake. This snake eats fishes, amphibians and crayfish.

HABITATS

- bottomland forests
- coniferous forest
- southern Illinois lowlands
- upland deciduous forest

ILLINOIS STATUS

- common
- endangered
- threatened
- native
- exotic

ILLINOIS RANGE

Permanent resident: southern 1/3 + lower half of the Illinois River

Summer resident:

Migrant:

Winter resident:

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 1999.

Biodiversity of Illinois, Volume 2: Woodland Habitats CD-ROM.