



common garter snake

Thamnophis sirtalis

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

FEATURES

The common garter snake averages 18 to 26 inches in length. Two subspecies are found in Illinois: the eastern garter snake and the Chicago garter snake. The name "garter snake" comes from the striped appearance, similar to that of the garters that were once commonly used to support men's socks. The appearance is variable. This snake may have either stripes or spots. If stripes are present there will be three, which are usually yellow but may be other colors. Usually a double row of black spots may be found between the stripes. The belly is green or yellow with two rows of indistinct black spots. The scales are keeled (ridged). The Chicago garter snake differs from the eastern garter snake in having the side stripes broken by vertical black crossbars.

BEHAVIORS

The common garter snake may be found statewide in Illinois. This animal lives in meadows, marshes, woodlands, hillsides, stream edges and vacant city lots. The common garter snake is terrestrial and active during the day. It will climb and swim. It hides under vegetation, boards or other objects on the ground. When alarmed, it may flatten its body and release an unpleasant musk from glands at the base

of the tail. It overwinters in rock crevices or in the burrows of other animals. Mating occurs in early spring. Young are born alive in the period late summer through early fall. The female gives birth to between seven and 85 young at one time, depending on her size and age. This snake eats earthworms, frogs, toads, salamanders, insects, mice and small birds.

HABITATS

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

ILLINOIS STATUS

- common
- endangered
- threatened
- native
- exotic

ILLINOIS RANGE

Permanent resident: statewide

Summer resident:

Migrant:

Winter resident:

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 1999.

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