

Eastern Ribbonsnake

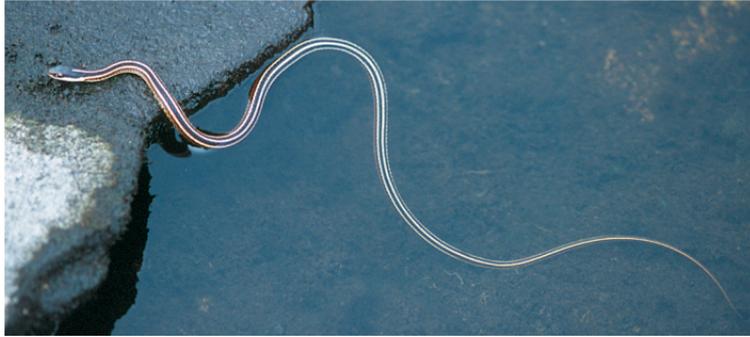
Thamnophis sauritus

STATUS

Threatened 

Threatened 

63



© JAMIE STEEVES, PARKS CANADA

Species Description

The Eastern Ribbonsnake is a long, slender, semi-aquatic snake (up to 70 cm long). It is jet-black with three yellow stripes running from head to tail along its back and sides. It has a caramel brown shade on the lower sides, and a white tear-drop scale in front of each eye. It is a harmless snake, and it is not venomous. In fact, none of our native snakes in Nova Scotia are venomous!

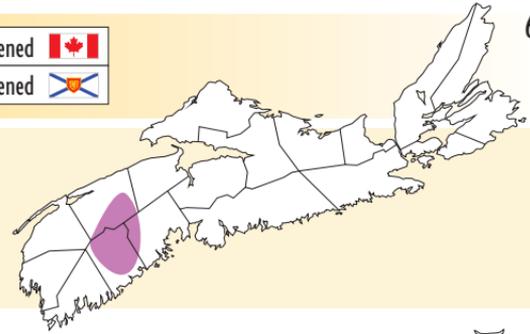


© JEFFIE MCNEIL

Distinguishing features:

Vertical white bar in front of each eye, solid yellow stripes (on 3rd and 4th scale row up from the belly).

Occurs in southwest Nova Scotia.



Habitat

Found in the summer in freshwater wetlands (stillwater streams, marshes, swamps, bogs) and on lakeshores. During this time it is rarely observed more than 30 m from the water's edge in areas with aquatic vegetation, shallow pools, and amphibians. Winter habitats are not well known but some snakes may overwinter a considerable distance from water in the forest.



© SARAH WALTON



© JEFFIE MCNEIL

Eastern Ribbonsnakes are typically found near water (wetlands, lakeshores) in the summer. They are semi-aquatic and swim well. They are thought to spend the winter and spring in upland forested habitats.

Interesting Points

- Females are ovoviparous (they give birth to live young) and are typically bigger than males.
- Snakes do not have eyelids! They have a transparent scale (spectacle) that covers each eye. It appears cloudy just before snakes shed their skin.
- Ribbonsnakes eat mostly small fish and amphibians.



Cloudy scale over the eye (about to shed skin!)



Similar Species

There are five snake species that live in Nova Scotia (remember, none are venomous): Smooth Green Snake, Ring-necked Snake, Red-bellied Snake, Maritime Garter Snake and the Eastern Ribbonsnake. The garter looks the most similar to the ribbonsnake and has many different colourations.

Maritime Garter Snake (both photos):

Bigger; diamond-shaped head; various colours; checkered patterning; no vertical white bar in front of each eye; paler stripe along the 2nd and 3rd scale rows, usually without the caramel coloring below it.



Threats to Survival

- Intentional harm by humans.
- Road mortality.
- Habitat loss and shoreline development.
- Mortality caused by pets (particularly cats).
- Lack of knowledge limits our ability to know how to help this species.



How You Can Help

Learn about snakes and tell your friends and family they are harmless. Report all sightings! Maintain the natural vegetation around lakeshore and wetlands on your property. Reduce vehicle mortality by watching for snakes on roads and trails. Keep your pets under control at all times so they do not harm wildlife.



Conservation canine survey

Contacts, Information, Sighting Reports & Stewardship Opportunities

Contact: Parks Canada (Kejimikujik National Park and National Historic Site) (902) 682-2770

Info: www.speciesatrisk.ca/ribbonsnake, www.sararegistry.gc.ca

Sighting Reports: 1-866-727-3447 or www.speciesatrisk.ca/sightings

Stewardship: volunteer.keji@pc.gc.ca, MTRI: info@merseytobeatic.ca