

# milksnake

## *Lampropeltis triangulum*

### FEATURES

Two subspecies of the milksnake are found in Illinois, the eastern milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum triangulum*) and the red milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum sypila*). The eastern milksnake averages 24 to 43 inches in length, has smooth scales, a y- or v-shaped mark at the back of the head, large blotches (brown with black borders) on a gray or white back alternating with small blotches (33-46) on the sides and a head about the same width as the neck. This species is found in the northern one-third of Illinois. The red milksnake is found in the southern one-third of Illinois. It averages about 21 to 28 inches in length with a blotch that ends as a collar shape right behind the head and 19-26 larger blotches on the body. The blotches are red or orange in adults. In central Illinois, the ranges of the two subspecies overlap with intergrades between the subspecies showing a combination of elongated or collar blotch patterns and from 21-38 body blotches that can be brown or orange.

### BEHAVIORS

The milksnake may be found statewide in Illinois. This reptile lives in fields, woodlands, rocky hillsides and river bottoms. It hides under logs, rocks and boards. This snake overwinters in small mammal burrows. The milksnake kills prey by constriction. When disturbed, it will vibrate the tail rapidly, hiss and strike. Mating occurs in the spring. About eight to 20 eggs are deposited by the female in June usually in a rotten log, stump or leaf litter. Eggs stick together. Hatching occurs in August or September. This snake feeds on small mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fishes. It was given the name “milksnake” because at one time people mistakenly believed that it could milk cows.

### TAXONOMY

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

### ILLINOIS STATUS

common, native

### ILLINOIS RANGE





eastern milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum triangulum*)



adult

© Scott Ballard



red milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum sypila*)

© Kory G. Roberts



© Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 2024. *Biodiversity of Illinois*.  
Unless otherwise noted, photos and images © Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

## **Aquatic Habitats**

bottomland forests; swamps

## **Woodland Habitats**

bottomland forests; coniferous forests; southern Illinois lowlands; upland deciduous forests

## **Prairie and Edge Habitats**

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie