

western fox snake *Pantherophis ramspotti*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Family: Colubridae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The western fox snake adult may be up to 54 inches long. An average of 41 (range of 35 to 57) large, dark blotches are located on the midline of the back. Smaller dark blotches are present along each side. The background color is yellow to light brown. The head is orange-brown to red-brown and usually does not show distinct markings. The belly is yellow with black marks. The anal plate is divided. Scales are weakly keeled.

BEHAVIORS

The western fox snake can be found in farm fields, open areas and wetlands in extreme northwestern Illinois. When threatened, this species coils, raises its head, strikes and vibrates its tail. The vibrating tail may cause a sound to be made if it is striking dead vegetation. This beneficial snake is not venomous. It eats small rodents, small birds and bird eggs. After mating, the female lays eight to 27 eggs in June or July. The eggs stick to each other and are placed in rotting logs, rotting stumps, leaf litter or sawdust piles. The name "fox snake" comes from an odor given off by scent glands at the base of the tail. The odor is said to be similar in smell to that of scent given off by a red fox.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

bottomland forests; marshes; wet prairies and fens

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

edge

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