

coachwhip *Coluber flagellum*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Family: Colubridae

ILLINOIS STATUS endangered, native

FEATURES

The coachwhip averages 42 to 60 inches in length. Its body is dark in front and lighter toward the tail, although the position of the switch in color is variable. The belly color corresponds to the back color. The scales on the tail are said to resemble a braided whip. The coachwhip has smooth scales.

BEHAVIORS

The coachwhip may only be found in Monroe County in Illinois. It lives in Mississippi River bluffs with dry, rocky hillsides and hill prairies. The coachwhip moves very quickly. It may hold its head off of the ground when moving. When disturbed it will vibrate the tip of its tail, which may make a sound like that of a rattlesnake's rattle. This snake is active during the day. It overwinters in rock crevices or in burrows. Mating occurs in late spring. The female deposits from four to 24 eggs under rocks or logs, in leaf litter or in soil in late June or early July. The eggs have small, grainy nodes on them. Hatching occurs by September. The coachwhip feeds on rodents, small birds, lizards, snakes, frogs and insects.

The coachwhip is endangered due to its limited range in Illinois and because it is susceptible to habitat destruction particularly from forest clearing and mining. Traffic fatalities (being hit by vehicles) and indiscriminate killing also have reduced numbers of this snake. Only one population of this animal is known in Illinois.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

none

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

hill prairie

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