

Great Plains ratsnake *Pantherophis emoryi*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Family: Colubridae

ILLINOIS STATUS endangered, native

FEATURES

The Great Plains ratsnake averages 24 to 36 inches in length. The scales in the middle rows along the back are weakly keeled (ridged) while the remaining scales are smooth. A “spearpoint” shape is present between the eyes. The tail has stripes underneath. A blotched pattern of gray, brown, red-brown or olive-brown is seen on a light gray body. The belly is patterned with black and white.

BEHAVIORS

The Great Plains ratsnake may be found in Illinois from Jersey County south to Randolph County. This species lives in rock bluffs near waterways, hill prairies, hillsides and brushy areas. This reptile is secretive, hiding under rocks, logs, boards, in rock crevices and in small mammal burrows in the day. Active at night in warm weather, it climbs readily. It will vibrate its tail when disturbed. The female deposits four to 12 eggs under objects on the ground during early summer. Eggs hatch about one month later. This snake kills its prey by constriction. It eats birds and small mammals.

The Great Plains ratsnake lives in a very small area of Illinois that is susceptible to habitat destruction, excessive collecting of snakes and heavy traffic.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

none

Woodland Habitats

upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

edge; hill prairie

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