

Garter Snakes have teeth (but no fangs or poison), and do tend to bite you when first captured. They also produce a smelly fluid intended to make you let them go. The bite is more surprising than it is painful - just a small puncture.

Northern Ribbon Snake

Ribbon snakes in Nova Scotia are known only from Queens and Lunenburg Counties, although they also live in southern Ontario and the north-eastern U.S. They look something like Garter Snakes, but are more slender with dark brown or black colour and a bright yellowish stripe down the back and on each side. Their preferred home is boggy or grassy places on the shores of quiet ponds or streams. Although active during the day, Ribbon Snakes seem nervous - they will quickly hide under plants when you approach. These snakes are also quite at home in the water. Ribbon Snakes are smaller than Garter Snakes; their young, about 10 to a litter, are born alive. Small fish, frogs and insects are common food animals.

Northern Ringneck Snake

This snake is easy to recognize. Its back and sides are a shiny bluish-black, but around its neck is a ring of yellow-orange. The yellow-orange or red-orange colour continues down the belly. Ring-necks are most common in southwestern and eastern mainland Nova Scotia; reports from northern N.S. and Cape Breton Island are rare. This is a woodland snake, most common near the shores of ponds, streams and bogs. During the day Ring-necks hide under rocks or fallen logs. At dusk they become active, hunting salamanders.

Females lay several yellowish-white eggs in damp places (under rocks, rotting wood) in open areas where the surface is exposed to sun heat. Sometimes many females lay eggs together in a group nest. Typical length of adults is 20 to 30 cm.

Ringneck Snakes are known for wriggling along the foundations of buildings and hibernating there. They may sometimes find their way into buildings.

Eastern Smooth Green Snake

Call it a Green Snake or grass snake, there's no mistaking this bright green creature. It is widespread in Nova Scotia, in grassy, shrubby or dry boggy areas, including suburban lawns. Because they are active during the day, Green Snakes are frequently captured by people. They should not be kept as pets - most refuse to eat in captivity. Green Snakes rarely try to bite.

These creatures are well camouflaged in grassy settings, and can move very quickly to escape noisy people. They can also climb up plants. They eat mostly moth larvae and spiders. In mid-summer, females lay from 3 to 8 eggs in the same sorts of places as Ringneck Snakes. The white eggs are about 2 to 3 cm long, and hatch into grey-green babies about 10 cm long.

Northern Redbelly Snake

These snakes can be coloured brown or grey on the back, but the distinctive belly is bright red-orange or orange. There is usually a lighter row of spots around the neck, but the other colours make it easy to tell from a Ringneck.

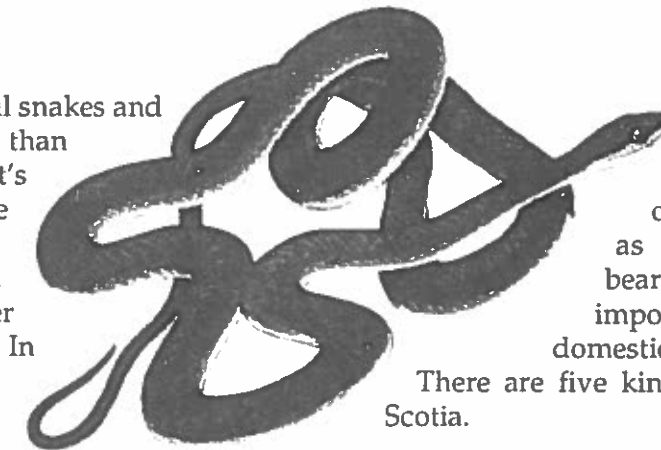
Redbelly Snakes are widespread in Nova Scotia, but are not often seen because they usually hide under rocks, logs or even discarded junk during the day. At night, or earlier on overcast days, they come out to eat their main food item - slugs. Redbelly Snakes are a true asset to people like blueberry farmers because they eat the slugs that damage fruit.

Females bear 3 to 12 young alive in late summer. The young start life at 7 to 10 cm long, and grow to 20-30 cm as adults.

info

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Snakes



Nova Scotia has no harmful snakes and none reaching much more than one meter long. Even so, it's surprising how many people dislike and fear snakes. Snakes have suffered from bad public relations ever since the Garden of Eden! In spite of the legends, snakes do not sting with their tongues, milk cows, swallow babies or bite their tails and roll away like hoops. Snakes do have some wonderful adaptations to help them survive without arms or legs. They do benefit us by eating a number of garden pests.

Take the forked tongue, for example. The long tongue collects particles from the air and carries them back to a special smelling organ on the roof of the mouth. It's a sensing tool, not a stinger. Snakes have no eyelids or external ear openings, but they can see well at short distances and can also detect ground vibrations. Snakes swallow their food whole. Their jaws are divided into separated sections joined only by flexible ligaments, so they can spread wide to swallow large food items.

As a snake grows, it sheds its skin as often as every 4 or 5 weeks. You can tell when a snake is ready to shed - its eyes look opaque bluish-white. The discarded skin looks like thin clear plastic, with every detail of the scales still visible.

Snakes in Nova Scotia hibernate over winter, often in large groups. Breeding usually happens in the spring; some types lay eggs, while others

bear their young alive. Snakes are eaten by hawks and other large birds, as well as foxes, raccoons and bears, but one of their most important predators is the domestic cat.

There are five kinds of snakes in Nova Scotia.

Maritime Garter Snake

If you have ever seen a large brown snake, it was probably a Garter Snake. Their colour can vary from brown to grey or yellowish, with a lighter stripe or row of spots along the sides. Garters are widespread in Nova Scotia, including some of the larger coastal islands such as Big and Little Tancooks. They are our largest snake species.

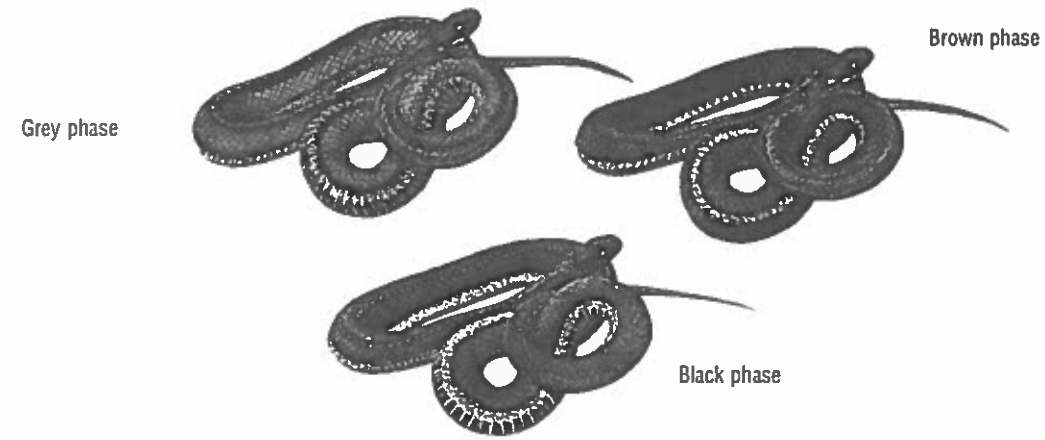
Garters Snakes tend to emerge from hibernation in May. They are common near pond and lake shores, as well as woodlands, rocky roadsides, farmlands, gravel pits and abandoned buildings. Daytime is their active period. You may see the same snake each sunny day basking in a warm spot. Garters are excellent swimmers too, moving over the surface of the water with an undulating motion. Some people call them water snakes. They eat a variety of small animals such as salamanders, fishes, frogs, worms and mice.

From 6 to 40 young are born alive in late summer. The baby Garter Snakes are greenish-gray, with no visible markings, and about 10 cm long.

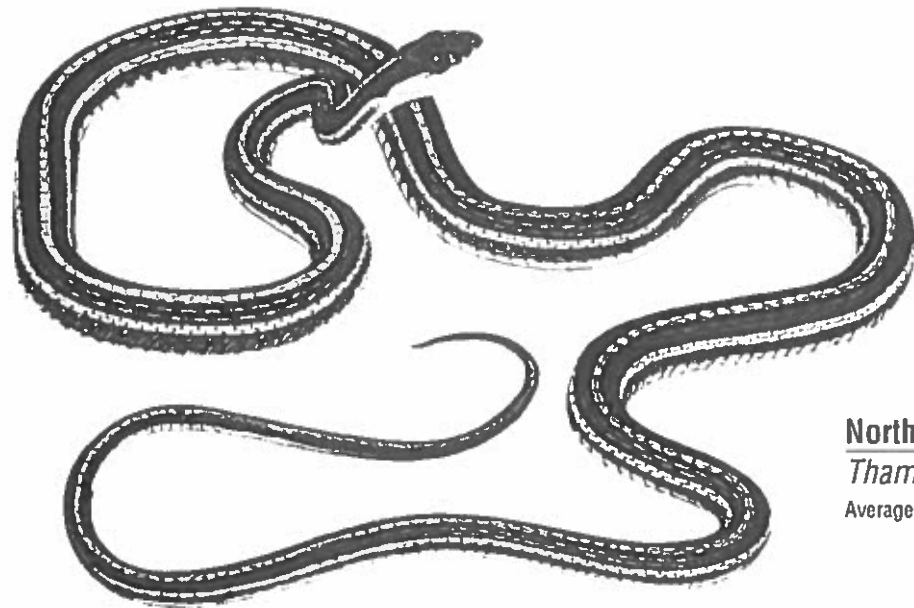
SNAKES

Typical Snakes

Colubridae

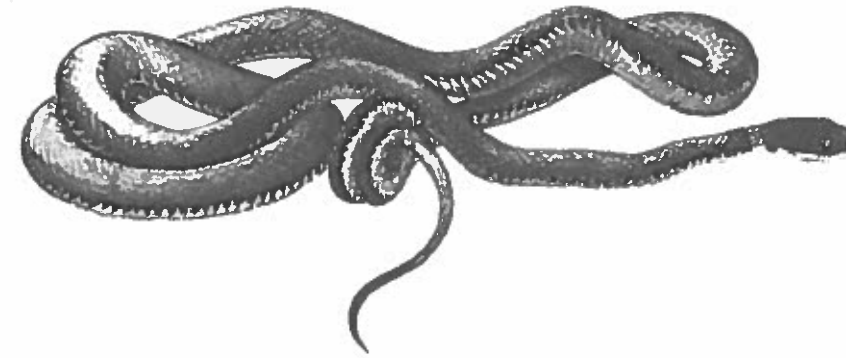
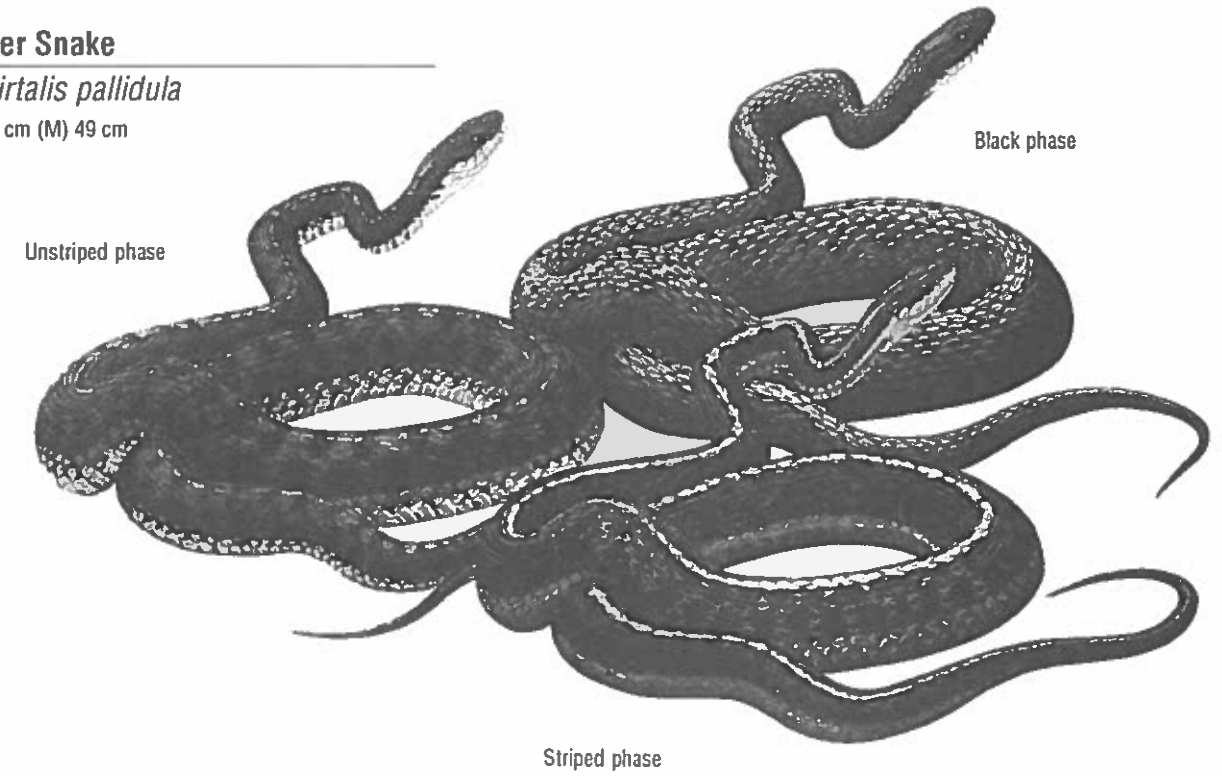


Northern Redbelly Snake
Storeria o. occipitomaculata
Average length 24 cm



Northern Ribbon Snake
Thamnophis sauritis septentrionalis
Average length (F) 55 cm (M) 50 cm

Maritime Garter Snake
Thamnophis sirtalis pallidula
Average length (F) 62 cm (M) 49 cm



Northern Ringneck Snake
Diadophus punctatus edwardsi
Average length 34 cm

Eastern Smooth Green Snake
Opheodrys v. vernalis
Average length 34 cm

