

Eastern, Florida, Speckled, Black, & Apalachicola Kingsnake

Lampropeltis getula, *L. floridana*, *L. holbrooki*, *L. nigra*, & *L. meansi*
Upland Snake Species Profile



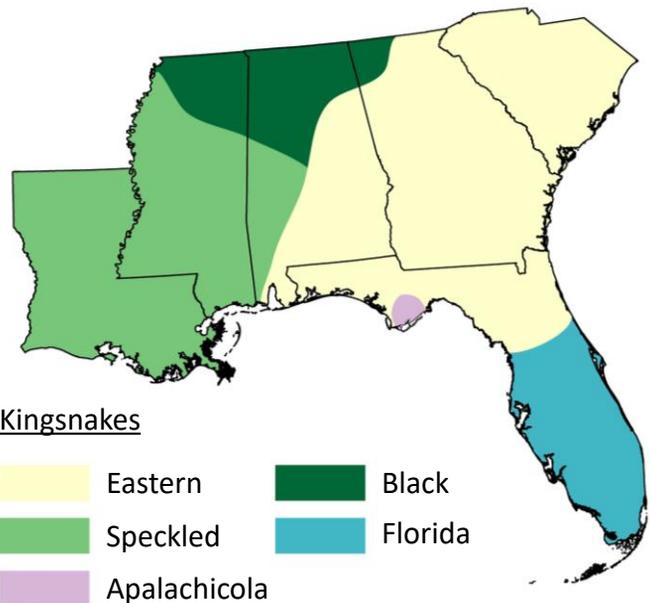
Eastern kingsnakes (pictured above) occur throughout most of the gopher tortoise's range.

Name Game

The genus of this species group, *Lampropeltis*, is a combination of two Greek words: lampros, which means shiny, and pelta, which means shield. "Shinyshield" refers to the glossy appearance of scales on all kingsnake species.

Range and Appearance: Eastern kingsnakes can be found throughout most of the gopher tortoise's range. Members of the genus can be found throughout the southern United States westward to California, as far north as Maine, and northwestward to Montana. Eastern (*L. getula*) kingsnakes are primarily black with white bands across their back. Florida (*L. floridana*) and Apalachicola (*L. meansi*) kingsnakes are creamy-white in color and have thick dark brown to tan bands. As their names suggest, black (*L. nigra*) kingsnakes are nearly solid black, and speckled (*L. holbrooki*) kingsnakes have a white speckled pattern over a black body. Adult snakes average 90 – 122 cm (3 – 4 ft). Intergrades of these species occur where ranges meet. Neonates look similar to adult snakes, but may display darker colors that fade over time.

Natural History: Kingsnakes are known for their propensity to eat other snakes (ophiophagy). They have evolved to be resistant to venom and therefore will regularly consume venomous snakes. Their diet also includes lizards, turtle eggs, birds, and small mammals. Kingsnakes are primarily active during the daytime and use refugia, like mammal burrows, stump holes, rock piles, and downed logs to escape extreme hot or cold temperatures. These terrestrial snakes use many habitat types including pine forests, sandhills, hardwood forests, and meadows. They are sometimes found around the shorelines of wetlands. The breeding season begins in the spring and eggs hatch during the summer.



**Upland Snake
Conservation Initiative**
www.gophertortoisecouncil.org

Kingsnakes

Lampropeltis getula, *L. floridana*, *L. holbrooki*, *L. nigra*, & *L. meansi*

Conservation Challenges: Kingsnakes are in decline throughout their range. The cause of decline is unknown, but contributing factors likely include habitat loss and fragmentation, wetland alteration, pollution, invasive species such as the red imported fire ant, road mortality, and overcollection for the pet trade. Kingsnakes have declined in many protected landscapes where other snake species prosper such as the Conecuh National Forest in Alabama and the Apalachicola and Ocala National Forests in Florida. None of these kingsnake species are state or federally protected, and laws governing their conservation and protection vary by state.



Florida kingsnakes (pictured above) are lighter in coloration than other kingsnake species.

Kingsnake Taxonomy: The genus *Lampropeltis* is one of the most diverse snake groups in North America. Historically, 18 subspecies of *L. getula* have been identified; however, recent genetic modeling such as mtDNA and nuclear DNA analyses have suggested many of the former subspecies should be classified as distinct species, which are presented in this guide. There are also several other, smaller, kingsnake species throughout the gopher tortoise's range including the scarlet kingsnake (*L. elapsoides*), short-tailed kingsnake (*L. extenuata*), mole kingsnake (*L. calligaster*), and northern and south Florida mole kingsnakes (*L. occipitolineata* and *L. rhombomaculata*, respectively).

For More Information:

Krysko, K. L. and K. M. Enge. 2019. Florida kingsnake, eastern kingsnake, Apalachicola kingsnake. Pp 475-482, in K. L. Krysko, K. M. Enge, and P. E. Moler (Eds.). *Amphibians and Reptiles of Florida*. University of Florida Press, Gainesville, FL.

Gibbons, W. 2017. *Snakes of the Eastern United States*. University of Georgia Press, Athens, GA.

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Kingsnakes are ophiophagus. The photo above shows an eastern kingsnake eating an eastern diamondback rattlesnake.

Snake Vocabulary

Ophiophagy/Ophiophagus: the feeding behavior of animals that hunt and eat snakes.

Venom Resistance: Kingsnakes are tolerant of the venoms created by new world vipers, namely rattlesnakes, copperheads, and cottonmouths. Kingsnakes, however, do not appear to have a resistance to coral snake venom, although the reason for this is unclear. Evidence suggests that this venom resistance is an evolved trait, meaning babies are hatched with an inherent resistance to the effects of venom. Several mammals have also evolved a resistance to snake venom including the opossum, honey badger, and mongoose.