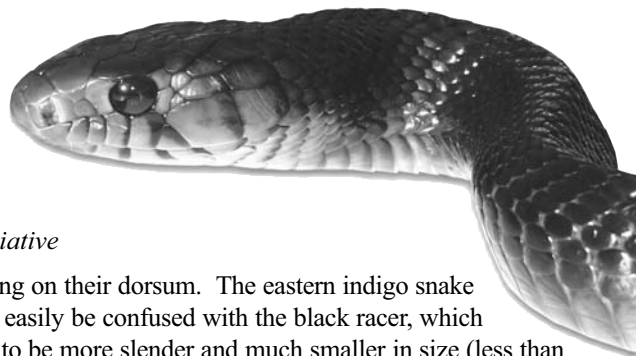


Upland Snake Species Profile:

Eastern Indigo Snake

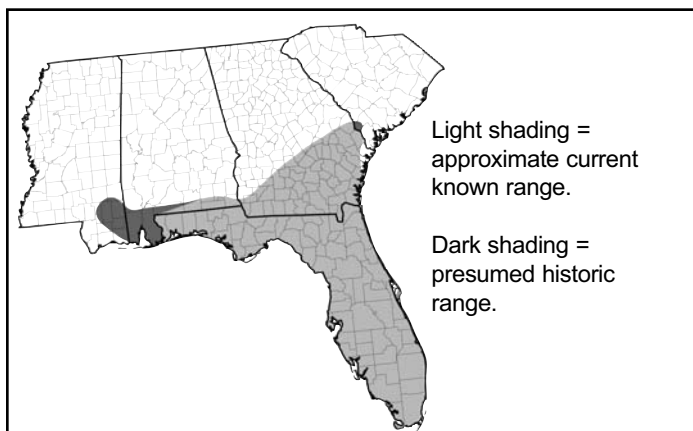
Drymarchon couperi



David Scott

TRACEY TUBERVILLE *Co-chair, GTC Upland Snake Conservation Initiative*

Range: Southeastern Coastal Plain of Florida and southern Georgia and (historically) in southern portions of Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina.



Conservation Status: Listed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as Threatened in 1978. Recovery plan developed in 1982.

The Natural Heritage Program global rank is G3 (species is "vulnerable" to extinction or elimination). The state ranks for each state in which the species occurs are listed below.

<u>State</u>	<u>State Rank</u>	<u>State Legal Protection</u>
AL	S1 critically imperiled	Protected
FL	S3 vulnerable	Threatened
GA	S3 vulnerable	Threatened
MS	S1 critically imperiled	?
SC	S? status unknown	Endangered

Although experimental reintroductions of eastern indigo snakes have been conducted throughout their historical range, naturally-occurring populations persist primarily in the Coastal Plain of Florida and southern Georgia. The species is considered extinct or rare in Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina.

Indigo snakes have been heavily impacted by past over-collecting and gassing of tortoise burrows. Habitat loss and degradation, road mortality associated with habitat fragmentation, and intentional killing by humans continue to threaten remaining populations.

Description: The eastern indigo snake is the longest snake in North America, reaching a maximum size of 2.6m (8.5ft). The eastern indigo snake has a single anal plate and smooth, shiny blue-black scales, although the scales of large males may show weak, partial keeling at mid-body. Most individuals have red or cream-colored patches around their chin, throat and/or cheeks. Young are similar in appearance to adults but may have some light

flecking on their dorsum. The eastern indigo snake could easily be confused with the black racer, which tends to be more slender and much smaller in size (less than 1.2m or 3.9ft) and has a divided plate, white chin patch, and dull scales.

Natural History:

This strictly diurnal snake is an active forager and its diet includes a wide variety of vertebrates. The eastern indigo snake commonly ingests snakes, including venomous snakes and other indigos.

The species' habitat preference appears to vary with season and perhaps with latitude, favoring dry xeric habitats in winter and more mesic habitats in summer. Seasonal movements between these habitat types occur during fall and spring. In areas where the eastern indigo snakes occur sympatrically with gopher tortoises, they rely heavily on tortoise burrows (both active and abandoned) for denning and nesting sites.

Eastern indigo snakes have very large home ranges (>100 hectares or 250 acres). Although eastern indigo snakes remain active throughout much of the winter, their home ranges in winter are smaller. Breeding occurs November-April. Females lay a clutch of 5 to 12 eggs sometime between March and July. Eggs hatch 90-120 days later. Males are territorial and male-male combat is known to occur.

Relevant Articles:

Diemer, J.E., and D.W. Speake. 1983. The distribution of the eastern indigo snake, *Drymarchon corais couperi*, in Georgia. 1983. *Journal of Herpetology* 17:256-264.

Landers, J.L., and D.W. Speake. 1980. Management needs of sandhill reptiles in southern Georgia. *Proc. Ann. Conf. S.E. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies* 34:515-529.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1982. Eastern indigo snake recovery plan. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Atlanta, GA.

For more information, contact:



GOPHER TORTOISE COUNCIL
www.gophertortoisecouncil.org