

Eastern Milksnake

Lampropeltis triangulum



Status: **Special Concern**

Threats:

- ◆ Due to its aggressive behaviour and proximity to buildings, it is often killed by humans
- ◆ Vehicle mortality is also an issue

Photo: Scott Gillingwater



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Description:

- ◆ Long and slender in shape
- ◆ Size between 61-90 cm
- ◆ Cream, tan or light grey in colour
- ◆ Blotches are red or dark brown bordered in black and are found along its back alternating with blotches on each side
- ◆ Blotch on neck may appear Y or V shaped
- ◆ Belly is light coloured with a checkerboard pattern
- ◆ Juveniles have red blotches bordered in black
- ◆ Only snake in Ontario that may appear reddish

Biology:

- ◆ Non-venomous
- ◆ Lays eggs; hatch Aug-Sept
- ◆ Eats small rodents, skinks, small ground-nesting birds and other snakes
- ◆ Most likely to be encountered at night when it hunts
- ◆ May appear aggressive if it is surprised or threatened: will raise its head in the air, vibrate its tail and may attempt to bite
- ◆ Is called a milksnake because, according to folklore, since it was often found around barns (where it was hunting for mice), it must be milking cows!

Habitat:

- ◆ Lives in a wide range of habitats, especially old fields and buildings where rodents are common
- ◆ Also found in pine forests, open deciduous woodland, rock barrens and sand dunes

Species at Risk
STEWARDS' GUIDE SERIES

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How to *Move A Snake*

Milksnake on Your Property? *Here's What You Can Do:*

- ◆ **If you see a Milksnake, leave it alone.** It may only be passing through to reach a preferred area for hibernation or summer feeding. It will continue on within a few hours or a couple days if you allow it safe passage. Make sure other people on your property know you've seen it so they won't be so surprised to come across it, and won't accidentally get too close to it.
- ◆ **Live and let live:**
 - ✓ Learn to appreciate these animals and the fact that we are lucky enough to have one of the few areas in Ontario where populations are still relatively healthy.
 - ✓ Keep field guides handy for easy identification.
 - ✓ Do your best to develop a live and let live philosophy!
 - ✓ Know that your attitude is changing to one that reflects more tolerance to the wild creatures we share Muskoka with.
- ◆ **Share your property:**
 - ✓ Keep your eyes open while cutting grass, and if possible cut after 11 am because the snakes may bask until this time.
 - ✓ Excess brush from pruning can be left in a pile for snakes to use as cover at the end of your property, away from the house or cottage.
 - ✓ Be aware of your pets. Strange behaviour could mean they are harassing a snake.
 - ✓ Teach your family and friends about snakes.
- ◆ **See a snake?** Submit your sighting to the Natural Heritage Information Centre at nhic.mnr.gov.on.ca/MNR/nhic/species/species_report.cfm.



Photo: Joe Crowley

If you must move a snake, be sure to move it to a safe area of your property or other appropriate area away from roads. Never relocate a snake more than 250 metres from where you found it.

1. If the snake is about to escape or move into brush, leave it alone and allow it to retreat or escape.
2. Tip a garbage bin on its side, and use a broom, rake or shovel to position the bin near the snake.
3. Gently guide or herd the snake into the bin, being careful not to get too close and not to push the snake.
4. When the snake is at the bottom of the container tip the bin up and secure the lid with tape. Never leave the bin in direct sunlight, since this heat will dangerously overheat the snake.
5. Carefully bring the snake to its new location. Place the bin on its side and either gently slide the snake out or allow the snake to leave on its own with the bin on its side. It will seek safety in vegetation or rocks.
6. Never try to handle or tease the snake as this is against the law.



Learn more. Check out the Species at Risk section on the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources website at www.mnr.gov.on.ca.