

Eastern Ribbonsnake

Thamnophis sauritus



Status: **Special Concern**

Threats:

- ◆ Shoreline development
- ◆ Wetland loss or degradation
- ◆ Road mortality



Description:

- ◆ Small, slim snake
- ◆ Size between 46-70 cm; females typically larger than males
- ◆ Dark brown or black in colour with 3 longitudinal yellow stripes running the length of its body
- ◆ Distinct white crescent-shaped spot in front of the eye
- ◆ Belly is yellow-green in colour
- ◆ Looks similar to the Eastern gartersnake, however its body is more slender and its tail is longer

Biology:

- ◆ Docile and timid
- ◆ Gives birth to 5-12 live young in Sept
- ◆ Eats mostly small fish and amphibians
- ◆ Is a good swimmer
- ◆ In winter, individuals hibernate together in burrows or rock crevices called hibernacula
- ◆ Is very active during the day
- ◆ Will hang in the branches of shrubs

Habitat:

- ◆ Is at the northern limit of its range
- ◆ Is rarely found more than 30 metres from the water's edge
- ◆ Prefers edges of swamps, bogs, ponds, streams, marshes and other densely vegetated areas

Species at Risk
STEWARDS' GUIDE SERIES

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How to *Move A Snake*

Ribbonsnake on Your Property?

Here's What You Can Do:

- ◆ **Leave the snake alone and it may leave on its own.** 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.
- ◆ **Keep snakes away from your home or cottage without harming them:**
 - ✓ remove or tidy up possible snake cover from around your cottage (plywood, junkpiles, tin and aluminum siding, old cars, tires, brush piles);
 - ✓ pile wood away from the cottage and up on a raised platform;
 - ✓ keep weeds near buildings cut down to a minimum; and
 - ✓ keep grass short in areas you use for recreation.
- ◆ **Share your property safely:**
 - ✓ Take note of snakes basking in open areas such as trails, rock outcrops, and grassy natural areas on your property.
 - ✓ When moving ground cover, be aware that a snake could be hiding in the brush.
 - ✓ Keep your eyes open while cutting grass, and if possible cut after 11 a.m. because the snakes may bask until this time.
 - ✓ Snakes could be out at night, so keep a flashlight with you while out in the dark.
 - ✓ Wear proper footwear, especially at night.
 - ✓ 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: Scott Gillingwater

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. Wear rubber boots and long pants to ensure your safety while you focus on the snake. You are in a safety zone if you stay 1 m away from the snake.
2. Clear the area of interested onlookers to reduce distractions. Remain calm. If things do not look right or go wrong, back away, re-assess the situation, and start again. If the snake is about to escape or move into brush, leave it alone and allow it to retreat or escape.
3. Tip a garbage bin on its side, and use a broom, rake or shovel to position the bin near the snake.
4. Gently guide or herd the snake into the bin, being careful not to get too close and not to push the snake.
5. When the snake is at the bottom of the container use the broom, rake or shovel to 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.
6. 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.
7. Never try to handle or tease the snake, which is the sort of behaviour that causes most bites.