

## Threats

There are many threats that contribute to the loss of individuals and small populations. Before being protected, eastern indigo snakes were commonly kept as pets, which reduced the breeding population. The practice of “gassing” gopher tortoise burrows (pouring gasoline into burrows to drive out the occupants) as part of rattlesnake roundups has also taken a toll on indigos, as well as many other species of wildlife.



Threatened by development

The practice is illegal in Florida but the laws are difficult to enforce.

Another source of mortality to indigos and many other species of snakes is intentional killing by humans. Although it is illegal, many indigos are harassed or killed simply because they are snakes and some people are afraid of all snakes. Harming an indigo snake is a federal offense which violates the Endangered Species Act.

The greatest threat to indigos is the loss, fragmentation, and degradation of their habitats. Habitat fragmentation is as serious to the eastern indigo as outright habitat destruction. When fragmentation occurs indigos are often forced to cross roads, lawns, and other developed areas which leaves them vulnerable to exposure and increases the rate of mortality from vehicular traffic, property owners and domestic animals.

## How you can help

**Educate yourself and others about indigos and the vital role that all snakes play in the environment.** Most snakes, including the indigo, are harmless. Report malicious destruction or harassment of eastern indigo snakes. **Call FFWCC toll-free: 1-888-404-3922**

**Support the establishment of regional and local preserves.** Protection of eastern indigo snake populations on managed tracts of optimal habitat is the best means of protecting this species.

Palm Bay supports the purchase of large tracts of land through an environmental service fee that is levied on each new building permit.

**Upon locating a dead, injured, or sick specimen of any covered species or any other threatened or endangered species, notification should be made as soon as possible to the:**

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Law Enforcement Office  
20501 Independence Blvd.  
Groveland, Florida 34736  
1-352-429-1037; AND**

**Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation  
Commission  
1-888-404-3922**

For more information please contact:  
City of Palm Bay  
Building Division  
Phone: 321-953-8924  
Email: [pbldg@palmbayflorida.org](mailto:pbldg@palmbayflorida.org)  
Website: [www.palmbayflorida.org](http://www.palmbayflorida.org)



## Eastern Indigo Snake

A  
Threatened  
Species



## Protection

The eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon corais couperi*) is a large, black, non-venomous snake found in the southeastern United States. It is widely distributed throughout central and south



Eastern Indigo Snake

Florida, but primarily occurs in sand hill habitats in northern Florida and southern Georgia. The eastern indigo snake was listed as a threatened species as a result of dramatic population

declines caused by over-collecting for the domestic and international pet trade, as well as mortalities caused by rattlesnake collectors who gassed gopher tortoise burrows to collect snakes. Since its listing, habitat loss and fragmentation by residential and commercial expansion have become much more significant threats to the eastern indigo snake.

In Florida, it is illegal to harass, harm, capture, keep, or kill an eastern indigo snake without specific state and/or federal permits.



## Natural History

Eastern indigo snakes are reptiles, and therefore, ectotherm. They are at the mercy of temperature extremes in the environment and must protect themselves from excessive heat and cold. Although indigos are very general in the types of habitats they will use, their home ranges must include suitable den sites. In places where indigos share their habitat with gopher tortoises, gopher tortoise burrows are often used for shelter. The snake may share the burrow with a tortoise, but most often indigos will occupy an old, deserted burrow.

Eastern indigos actively search for prey during the day and enter dens at nights. They consume a wide variety of foods; virtually any small vertebrate that is available will be grabbed and swallowed alive. Fish, frogs and toads, other snakes (including venomous snakes and other indigos), turtles, birds, and small mammals are all documented prey of the indigo snake.

## Habitat

Over most of its range, the eastern indigo snake frequents several habitat types, including pine flatwoods, high pine, dry prairie, tropical hardwood hammocks, edges of freshwater marshes, agricultural fields, coastal dunes, and human-altered habitats. Indigos need a mosaic of habitats to complete their annual cycle. Interspersion of tortoise-inhabitant sand hills and wetlands improves habitat quality for this species.



Eastern Indigo Snake

## Identification



The eastern indigo snake is a large, docile, non-poisonous snake growing to a maximum length of about 8 feet. The color in both young and adults is shiny bluish-black, including the belly, with some red or cream coloring about the chin and sides of the head.

Very little is known about eastern indigo snake reproduction in the wild. What information that is available comes from captive populations, and these data represent the upper limits of what snakes in the wild might be able to do.

Mating occurs from winter to early spring and eggs are deposited in spring. The young are 16 to 24 inches long at hatching and may have the same coloration as an adult, or may be speckled with blue or white flecks which fade. What the young snakes do or how well they survive in the wild are just a few of the many questions that cannot be answered at this time.