

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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EASTERN INDIGO SNAKE PROPOSED AS A THREATENED SPECIES

The eastern indigo snake has been proposed to be listed as a threatened species, Keith M. Schreiner, Associate Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today.

The proposal was published in the August 1, 1977, Federal Register and interested persons have until October 30, 1977, to comment.

The main threat to the eastern indigo snake comes from overcollecting; prime specimens sell for as much as \$250 in many areas of the country, chiefly the Northeast. The large size (to about 2.5 meters or about 8 feet), indigo color, and docile disposition have made it desirable as a pet and led to the elimination of the species in areas where it was formerly common.

The States of Florida, Mississippi, and Georgia strictly protect the eastern indigo snake. However, these States cannot effectively control the trade in snakes once they leave the State. It has been a common practice to claim that the indigos in trade came from Alabama or South Carolina, where the snake has not been noted by experienced herpetologists in many years. This claim is virtually impossible completely to refute. Therefore, trade in illegally taken indigo snakes can continue in spite of strong State laws. There are no laws to protect the eastern indigo snake in Alabama or South Carolina.

The eastern indigo snake inhabits a region that is experiencing rapid development resulting in considerable loss of available habitat. A favorable characteristic of its habitat includes well-drained soils which are ideal for human settlement, resulting in a serious decline in the populations of eastern indigo snakes in many areas.

In addition to overcollecting and habitat destruction, eastern indigo snakes may have declined because of the practice of gassing gopher tortoise burrows. This technique is used to drive out rattlesnakes which use the tortoise burrows as a refuge. Indigo snakes also use gopher tortoise burrows and recent research has indicated that eastern indigo snakes are frequent victims of this practice.

It is hoped that this proposed action will stimulate conservation activities for this unique snake.

Persons wishing to participate in this rulemaking should submit written comments, preferably in triplicate, to the Director (FWS/OES), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

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