

ATLANTIC SALT MARSH SNAKE

Nerodia clarkii taeniata



Photo of Atlantic salt march snake. Photo courtesy of USFWS/Photo by Robert S. Simmons.

FAMILY: Colubridae

STATUS: Threatened throughout its range (*Federal Register*, November 29, 1977)

DESCRIPTION: The Atlantic salt marsh snake is a slender, heavily keeled water snake about 2 feet in total length, with a pattern of stripes that are variously broken into blotches. The dorsal ground color is pale olive, patterned with a pair of dark brown stripes running down the back and enclosing a pale mid-dorsal stripe. These dark stripes usually become fragmented posteriorly into a series of elongate blotches. There is also a row of dark blotches along the lower sides of the body, which merge to form stripes in the neck region. The ventral surface is black with a median series of yellowish spots. This snake feeds on small fish in shallow water. It is most active at night, during periods of low tide.

REPRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT: Little is known about the life history of this snake, but it is probably similar to the Gulf salt marsh snake. Females of the Gulf Coast race produce from 2 to 14 live young, usually in mid-summer.

RANGE AND POPULATION LEVEL: Although historically reported from coastal areas of Volusia, Brevard, and Indian River counties, Florida, it now appears to be restricted to a limited coastal strip in Volusia County. Its population level is currently unknown.

HABITAT: The Atlantic salt marsh snake inhabits coastal salt marshes and mangrove swamps. Specifically, it occurs along shallow tidal creeks and pools, in a saline environment ranging from brackish to full strength. It is often associated with fiddler crab burrows.

REASONS FOR CURRENT STATUS: Extensive drainage and development within the coastal zone has reduced the available habitat of this species. Continued filling of coastal wetlands will further limit the range of this already restricted reptile. Additionally, creating impoundments in marshlands for mosquito control may eliminate habitat by changing water salinity. There is also a concern that habitat disturbance within these regions may have broken down natural isolating mechanisms between the Atlantic salt marsh snake and the adjacent freshwater snake (*Nerodia fasciata pictiventris*). This breakdown may be responsible for hybridization between these species.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION: Along with efforts to discourage further loss of habitat, there is also a need for extensive studies on the life history and status of this species.

REFERENCES:

Kochman, H.I. 1992. Atlantic Salt Marsh Snake. Pages 111-116 in Paul E. Mohler, ed., Rare and Endangered Biota of Florida, Volume III. Amphibians and Reptiles. University Press of Florida, Gainesville. Page 291.

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Last Updated: 4/2001
Last Reviewed 9/2005