

IDENTIFICATION: The Eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon couperi*) is a large glossy blue-black non-poisonous snake reaching lengths of up to 9 feet. It is the longest snake native to the United States. It is a solid color with an occasional orange, pink white or reddish area under the chin, which may extend to the throat and cheeks. It is sometimes confused with the similar black racer or the black pine snake, but is much stockier than the slender racer, which has a white chin patch and the black pine snake, which has no chin patch and keeled rather than smooth scales.



Indigos are active during the day during much of the year and prey on small mammals, lizards, birds, frogs, toads, and other snakes. They are immune to the venom of all North American poisonous snakes and readily eat them. Indigos use a variety of habitats during the year, but are almost always associated with gopher tortoises and the sandy ridges they inhabit. Indigos often share the gopher's den during hot or cold weather. Indigos are relatively docile and slow moving, probably contributing to their decline.

The Eastern indigo snake was [designated as a threatened species](#) and provided protection under the Endangered Species Act on 3-3-1978. Capturing specimens for the pet trade industry and loss of habitat were two factors reported as reasons for its population decline and listing as a threatened species. An ongoing reintroduction program has resulted in approximately 100 young indigo snakes being released on the Conecuh National Forest. Sightings are rare but U. S. Forest Service and project personnel have seen evidence of survival and reproduction. Conservationists are hopeful these efforts and ongoing interest in longleaf pine restoration will result in increased Eastern indigo snake populations.



FORESTRY CONSIDERATIONS: Forestry operations are not likely to directly affect indigo snakes, unless woods workers are tempted to kill such a large, slow-moving snake or collapse the entrance of a gopher tortoise burrow causing occupants to be entombed. Research indicates that heavy equipment may cause burrow collapse when operated within 15 feet of the entrance. Conversion of woodlands to other uses or habitat types may negatively impact indigo populations. Loss of gopher tortoise habitat and, subsequently, gopher tortoises would likely negatively impact indigo snakes. Prescribed fire is highly beneficial to the Eastern indigo snake and many other species that utilize open pine stands in Alabama's lower coastal plain.

DISTRIBUTION BY COUNTY: There are no recent records of occurrence for the indigo snake in Alabama outside of Conecuh National Forest. Counties in which indigo snakes were historically known to occur include Baldwin, Bullock, Conecuh, Covington, Escambia, Geneva, Mobile and Washington.

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Bottom: Billy Pope, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources



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