

EASTERN INDIGO SNAKE

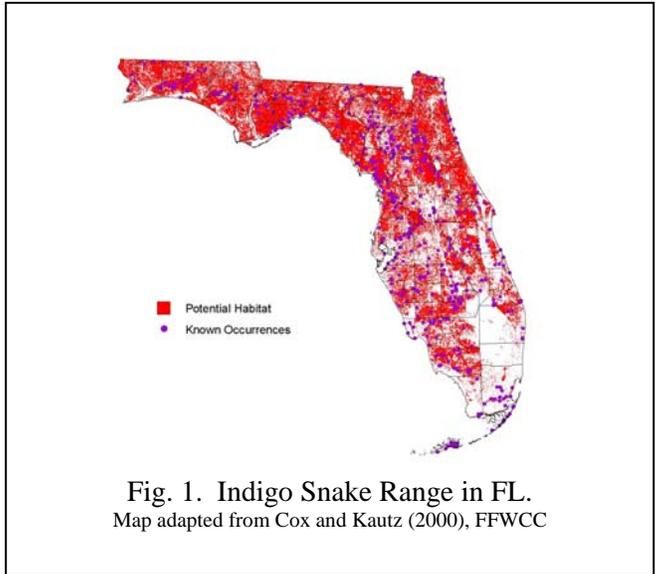
(Drymarchon corais couperi)

The Eastern Indigo Snake is currently listed as a **threatened** species and could soon be endangered without your help. **Both state and federal law protect the Indigo, and it is illegal to harass, harm, capture, or kill this snake.**



Photo courtesy of the Florida Agricultural Information Retrieval System

been found in all Florida counties, but is more common in the panhandle than in the peninsular area.



Description

- The Eastern Indigo snake is the longest North American snake with a maximum recorded length of 8.6 feet.
- Body coloration is shiny to iridescent black with cream or red markings around the chin and throat. Chin markings are variable in both color (white to pink to red) and extent of markings (may extend into belly).
- The only snake commonly confused with the Eastern Indigo snake is the Black Racer, both of which are harmless to humans. The Black Racer is smaller and its color is a dull black with white or brown on the throat region.

Range

Historically, the range of the indigo snake was from South Carolina to the southern tip of Florida and west to Mississippi. It is now found almost exclusively in Florida (Fig. 1) and the coastal plain of Georgia. It has

Habitat:

Indigo snakes use a variety of habitats in Florida, including agricultural fields, pastures, streamsides, swamps, sandhills, and flatwoods. They use gopher tortoise burrows, stump holes and root channels as dens and to lay eggs.

Management and Protection

Farmers and property owners can be directly involved in the protection of the Indigo Snake by following these recommendations and precautions:

- Be aware when driving. Road mortality is a contributing factor in the snake's decline.
- Locate, mark and protect gopher tortoise burrows from vehicles and farm equipment by leaving a 25-foot buffer undisturbed around the entrance. If the proposed activity can not leave such burrows undisturbed, contact the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and/or the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCCC) for guidance.
- Make sure farm workers are aware of the protected status of the Indigo and that it is harmless to humans. Require workers to cease work if an Eastern Indigo

snake is spotted in a work area until the snake(s) has removed itself safely from the area.

- Use management procedures such as prescribed burning in longleaf pine/turkey oak and flatwoods forests. Periodic burning is necessary to reduce litter accumulation and increases the herbaceous layer. This benefits not only the Indigo Snake, but also the gopher tortoise, the endangered Red-Cockaded Woodpecker, and other wildlife.
- Establish/protect corridors. The establishment of corridors provides protection for traveling between areas of suitable habitat. Hedgerows within cropfields and pastures can be especially valuable as protective cover.
- Do not remove stumps in forested areas. This may eliminate an alternative refuge source if burrows are lacking.
- Do not use fumigants, such as gasoline, in burrows. This practice has been used to collect rattlesnakes in the past, but it is now illegal.
- Use care with the use of pesticides that might be harmful to the Indigo, either directly or through the food chain.

For landowners interested in improving habitat for the indigo snake, several opportunities exist to partner with the USFWS for conservation of this species. The USFWS' "Safe Harbor" policy now provides regulatory certainty to landowners that voluntarily improve habitat on their property for federally threatened/endangered species.

If in the future, you plan to convert areas of native habitat to more intensive land uses (e.g., rangeland to pasture or crops), contact NRCS for assistance in incorporating conservation practices to protect this threatened species. The NRCS works with the USFWS and FFWCC to ensure that Federal and State-listed species will not be adversely affected by actions planned by landowners. If you do not contact NRCS, please remember that the indigo snake is a protected species and, as a minimum, your actions should be cleared by the USFWS and/or the FFWCC

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
(address to inserted below by District Conservationist)

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
(address to be inserted below by District Conservationist)

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