



red-sided and eastern garter snakes

Thamnophis sirtalis

Kingdom: Animalia
Division/Phylum: Chordata - vertebrates
Class: Reptilia
Order: Squamata
Family: Colubridae

Features

Garter snakes tend to range from 18 to 26 inches with the red-sided garter snake being slightly larger than the eastern subspecies. The background color is dark brown to greenish with a cream to yellowish stripe down the center of the back. There also is a stripe down the length of each side. The belly usually is greenish to bluish white. The scales are keeled (ridged). The red-sided subspecies has bright red bars between the dark spots that are above the stripes down the sides.

Natural History

The two subspecies interbreed readily. Like all garter snakes, they bear live young. Young snakes eat earthworms and insect larvae. Adults eat amphibians, small fish, and even small mice. They may hibernate in abandoned wells or buried rubble, even under house foundations. The red-sided garter snake is much more aquatic than its eastern counterpart.

Habitats

Mississippi River; Missouri River; interior rivers and streams; natural lakes and prairie marshes; wet prairies and fens; bottomland forests; temporary water supplies; constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

statewide

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001. *Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats* CD-ROM.