

A black rat snake is coiled on a weathered log. The snake's body is dark with a lighter-colored head and a pattern of small, light-colored spots along its back. The log is light brown and shows signs of decay, with a small hole visible. The background is a blurred natural setting.

THE ARBORETUM AT PENN STATE

# BLACK RAT SNAKE

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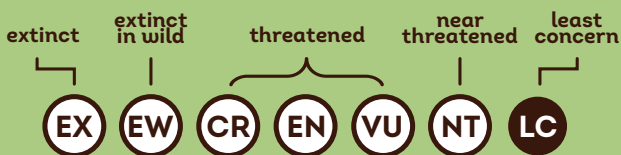
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**NAME:** *Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta*

### CONSERVATION STATUS:



**SIZE:** 5–8 feet

**WEIGHT:** 4 pounds

**GROUP TERM:** den; nest; pit; knot

**NUMBER OF YOUNG:** 3–80

**HABITAT:** farmlands; forests; fields

**LIFESPAN:** 10–15 years

### DISTRIBUTION:



■ year-round

# BLACK RAT SNAKE

## DESCRIPTION

The black rat snake is the largest and most widespread out of the five subspecies of Eastern rat snake. With its black dorsum (back) and white venter (belly), this snake is a common fixture of agricultural fields and gardens throughout Pennsylvania. Like all reptiles, it is ectothermic, using the outside environment to maintain its body temperature. As a constrictor, the black rat snake is non-venomous and essentially harmless to humans, preferring to hide in trees and underneath ground cover.

## DIET

Black rat snakes eat small rodents, squirrels, birds, and eggs, using constriction to suffocate their prey.

## THREATS

Although predators of juvenile black rat snakes include hawks, Great Horned Owls, foxes, and raccoons, adults have few known threats aside from humans.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- The black rat snake can vibrate its tail to imitate the timber rattlesnake, a form of Batesian mimicry (in which an edible animal mimics a toxic one to avoid being preyed upon).
- During the winter, up to 60 snakes (including the black rat, copperhead, and timber rattlesnake) may hibernate together underground.
- If threatened, this snake will assume an S-like “kink” posture to imitate a fallen branch.

“Eastern Rat snake.” Virginia Herpetological Society, n.d. Web. 22 June 2017.

“Species Pages: Black Rat Snake.” *Nature Trail*. The Pennsylvania State University, 2002. Web. 22 June 2017.

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