

Eastern Indigo Snake

Drymarchon corais

Indigo snakes are massive, blue-black snakes that are a real treat to encounter in the wild. They are the longest snakes in the United States, with some individuals reaching a total length of almost nine feet. The indigo snake's huge size and gentle demeanor have long made it a favorite with carnivals, sideshows and animal dealers.

The commercial popularity of the species caused its numbers to decline dramatically. In 1978, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed indigo snakes as a threatened species in all portions of its range; federal protection has helped to stop collection of these snakes from the wild. The numbers of indigo snakes are still declining throughout most of the Southeast. Habitat loss and fragmentation is the main problem facing these snakes today. These snakes live in a variety of habitats, and historically were found along with gopher tortoises in sandy scrub habitats. They have large home ranges and prefer vast areas, unsettled by people. Habitat throughout much of this snake's range in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi has been lost to housing developments, shopping centers, and urban sprawl. Many indigo snakes are killed by cars.

Indigo snakes are active snakes that spend a great deal of time foraging for food and mates. They are one of the few truly diurnal snake species, meaning that they are active during the day and rest at night. During times of inactivity, such as at night or during cooler months, indigo snakes often hide in gopher tortoise burrows (the tortoises don't seem to mind). Indigo snakes will eat almost any animal that is small enough to swallow. They do not kill their prey by constriction, but swallow their prey alive. Common foods include: other snakes (including venomous species), frogs, small mammals, birds, and fish. We once had a pet indigo at SREL that would eat canned sardines! (It wasn't much fun to clean his cage...)

In late spring, female indigo snakes lay about 5-12 large eggs in an underground burrow or other cavity. The snake eggs hatch in about three months into patterned hatchlings. These 1-foot babies grow rapidly and may reach adult size in two to three years.

This information is provided by [Savannah River Ecology Laboratory Outreach](#) and [SPARC](#).

Photos by David Scott. Written by Tony Mills. Layout and Design by Lindy Nowak.

