

Common Snakes of Maryland Photo Guide



By: Kerry Wixted
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Table of Contents

The common snakes in this guide are arranged so that similar looking species are represented close to one another. Below is an alphabetized list of the common snakes represented in this guide with page references as well as a list of Maryland snakes not found in the guide. For information on snakes not found in this guide, please visit our website: dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife.

Maryland Snakes found in the guide:

- Common Gartersnake ... pgs 15-16
- Common Watersnake ... pgs 7-9, 21
- Dekay's Brownsnake ... pg 18
- Eastern Copperhead... pgs 4, 5, 21
- Eastern Hog-nosed Snake ... pg 14
- Eastern Milksnake ... pg 20
- Eastern Ratsnake ... pgs 10-11, 21
- Eastern Ribbonsnake ... pg 17
- North American Racer ... pgs 12-13, 21
- Northern Ring-necked Snake ... pg 19
- Southern Ring-necked Snake ... pg 19
- Timber Rattlesnake ... pg 6

Maryland Snakes not found in the guide:

- Coastal Plain Milksnake
- Common Wormsnake
- Eastern Kingsnake
- Eastern Pinesnake
- Mountain Earthsnake
- Northern Mole Kingsnake
- Plain-bellied Watersnake
- Queensnake
- Rainbow Snake
- Red Cornsnake
- Red-bellied Snake
- Rough Greensnake
- Scarlet Snake
- Smooth Earthsnake
- Smooth Greensnake



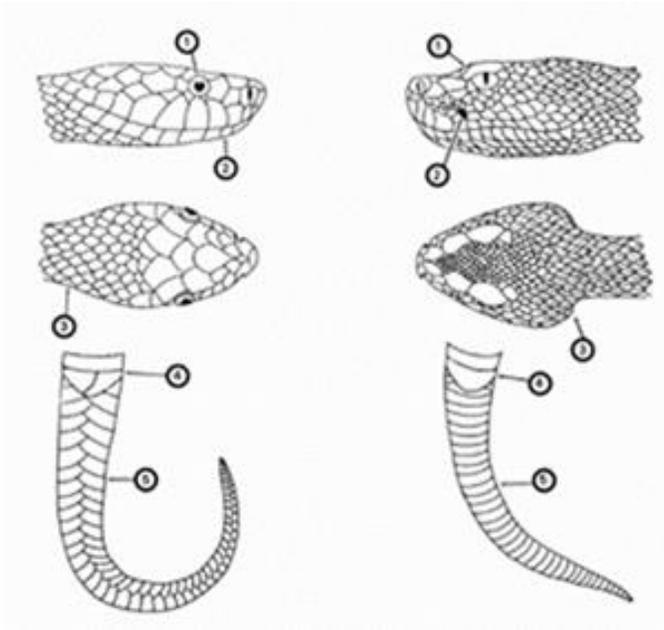
Acknowledgements:

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Snakes of Maryland

Snakes are an integral part of Maryland's fauna, functioning as important predators of mice, rats and other animals. Snakes are limbless reptiles with elongate bodies that are covered with scales. Maryland is home to 27 species and sub-species of snakes. This guide covers commonly encountered snakes.

Two species, the Eastern Copperhead and the Timber Rattlesnake, are pit vipers (Subfamily Crotalinae) and possess medically significant venom. Pit vipers are named for the heat-seeking pit between each eye and nostril. Both of Maryland's pit vipers should be treated with caution and should not be approached or handled. The graphic on the left, and the associated table below, show characteristics of pit vipers in Maryland versus other Maryland snakes. These characters do not work for venomous snakes outside of Maryland. For more information on snakes, please visit: dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife



Other Maryland Snake ID Characters

1. Round pupils
2. No sensory pit
3. Head slightly wider than neck*
4. Divided anal plate scale**
5. Double row of scales on the underside of tail **

Pit Viper ID Characters

1. Elliptical pupils
2. Sensory pit between eye and nostril
3. Head much wider than neck*
4. Single anal plate scale**
5. Single scales on underside of tail**

* Some snake species, like Eastern Ratsnakes, Common Watersnakes, and Common Gartersnakes will flatten their heads when threatened to mimic pit vipers.

** These characteristics are helpful when examining shed snake skins.

Eastern Copperhead



Photo by: Richard H. Legere Jr.

Venomous. Found throughout most of Maryland. Has Hershey-kiss shaped markings that are skinny at the top and wider at the base. Head is coppery in color with a contrasting upper lip.

Eastern Copperhead- Juvenile

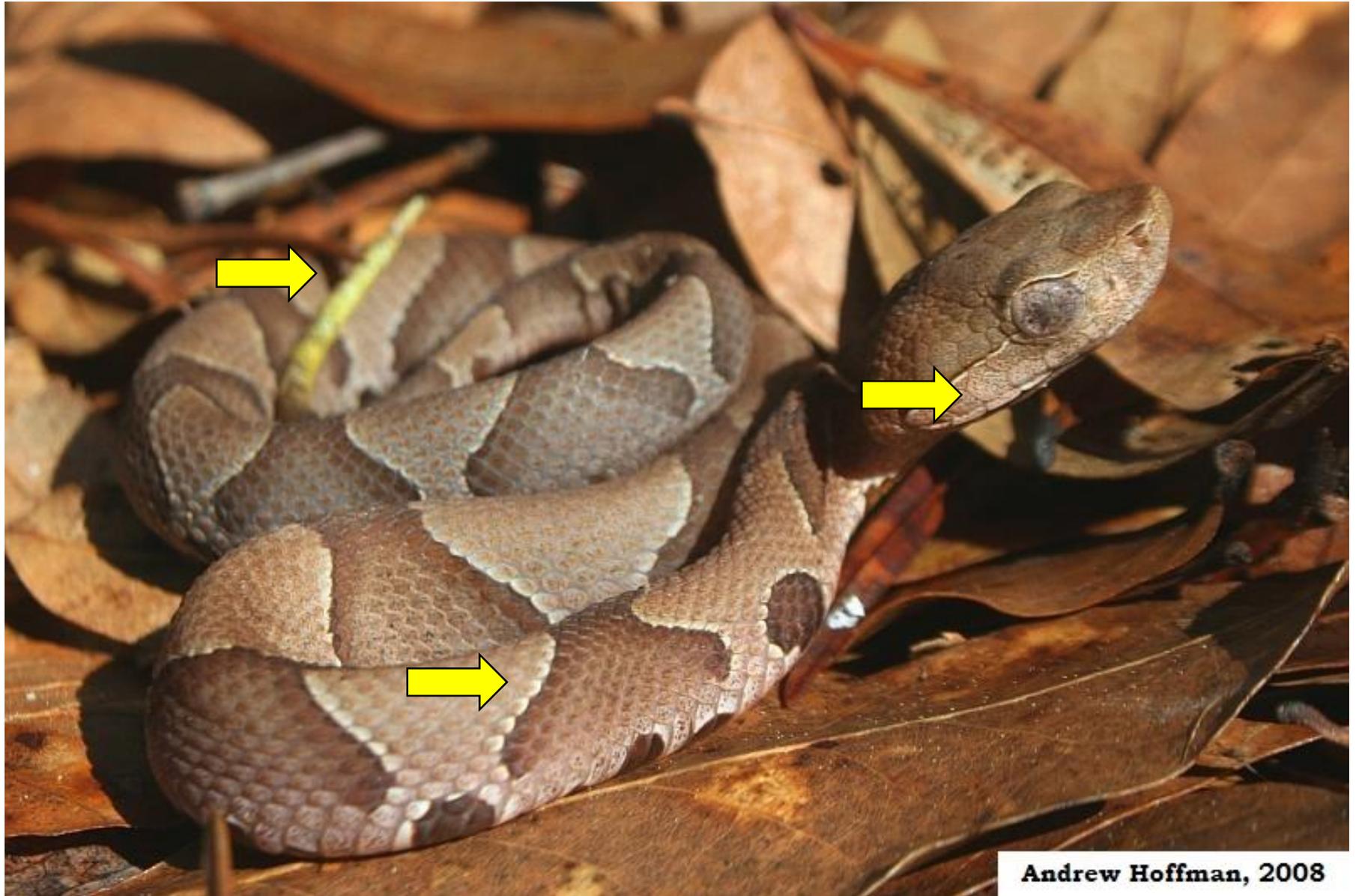


Photo by: Andrew Hoffman CC by NC ND 2.0

Venomous. Found throughout most of Maryland. Has Hershey kiss shaped markings that are skinny at the top and wider at the base. Head is coppery in color with a contrasting upper lip. Juveniles have a bright yellow tail used as a lure for prey.

Timber Rattlesnake



Photo by: Peter Paplanus CC by 2.0

Venomous. Found in western Maryland. Color variable from light and striped to almost dark black with jagged stripes. Has distinct rattle at end of tail.

Common Watersnake



Photo by: Judy Gallagher CC by 2.0

Found throughout Maryland. Pattern highly variable with variations including bands that are thicker at the top and thinner at the bottom, incomplete bands, or no bands. Has dark lip stripes. Often mistaken for cottonmouth (water moccasin) which does not occur in Maryland.

Common Watersnake



Photo by: Jane Kirkland CC by NC ND 2.0

Found throughout Maryland. Pattern highly variable with variations including bands that are thicker at the top and thinner at the bottom, incomplete bands, or no bands. Has dark lip stripes. Often mistaken for cottonmouth (water moccasin) which does not occur in Maryland.

Common Watersnake- Juvenile

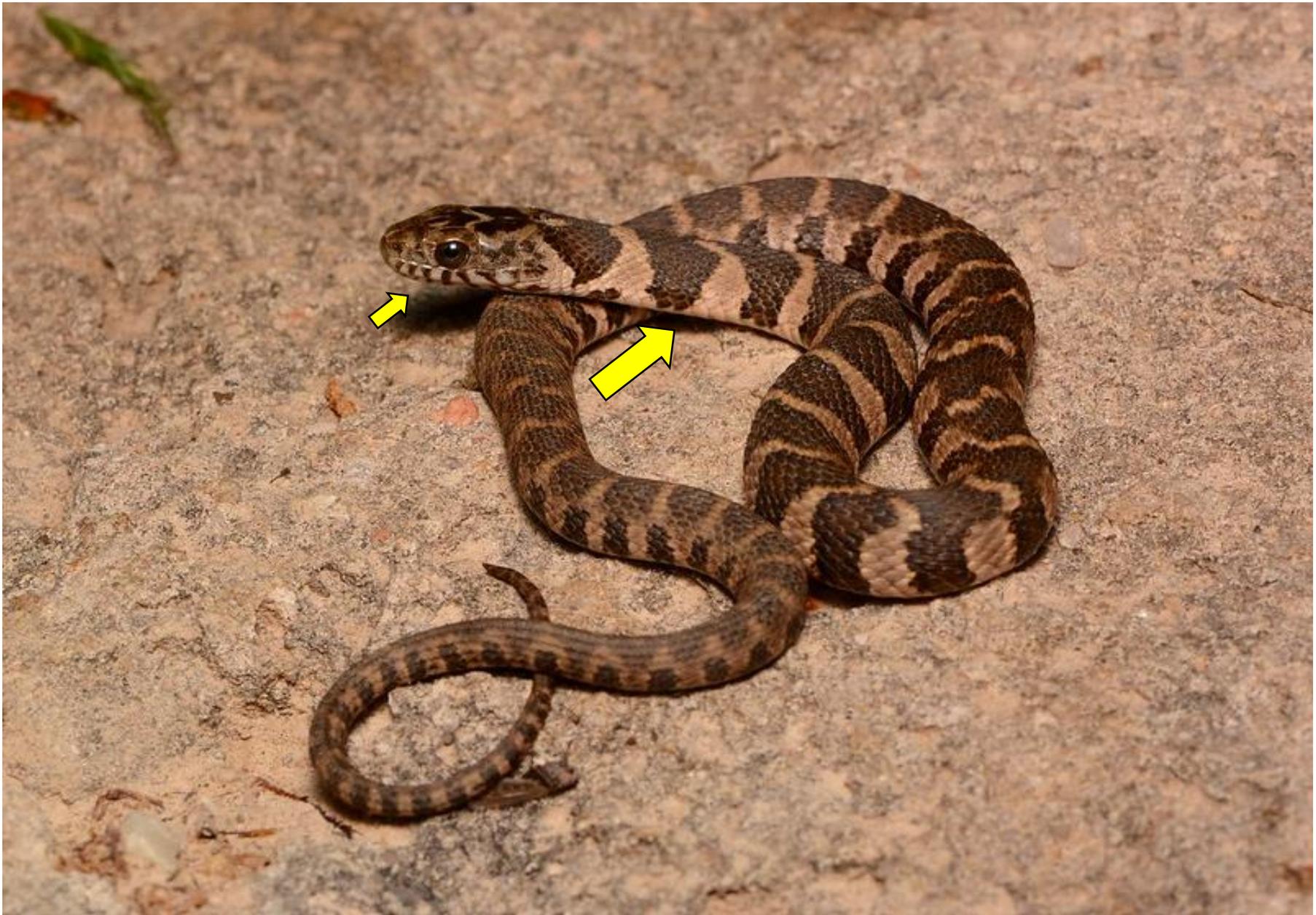


Photo by: Andrew DuBois CC by NC 2.0

Found throughout Maryland. Pattern highly variable with variations including bands that are thicker at the top and thinner at the bottom, incomplete bands, or no bands. Has dark lip stripes.

Eastern Ratsnake



Photo by: Richard Orr

Found throughout Maryland. Uniform black on top or with faint traces of a spotted pattern. Throat and underside light colored. Adept climber.

Eastern Ratsnake- Juvenile



Photo by: Robert Warren

Found throughout Maryland. Grayish with dark blotches along back. Has dark bar between eyes that continues past the eye to corner of mouth.

North American Racer



Photo by: Lisa Reid CC by NC ND 2.0

Found throughout Maryland. Sleek in appearance. Plain black above and steely gray to black below. Often white coloration seen on the chin. Large prominent eye.

North American Racer- Juvenile



Photo by: Bill Hubick, Maryland Biodiversity Project

Found throughout Maryland. Strongly patterned, like watersnakes and ratsnakes, but have more blotches down the back, a set of blotches along the centerline and proportionally larger eyes, an adaptation for open field hunting.

Eastern Hog-nosed Snake

Andrew Hoffman 2009



Photo by: Andrew Hoffman CC by NC ND 2.0

Found throughout Maryland. Coloration is variable with yellow, brown, gray, orange or red on a dark splotch-patterned back. However, some individuals are an un-patterned ebony black or dark grey. Snout upturned. Often will flatten out head, hiss, pretend to strike, and/or play dead if disturbed.

Common Gartersnake



Photo by: Kerry Wixted

Found throughout Maryland. Back is greenish, olive, brown or black with a yellow or white stripe down the centerline. May have a white to yellow stripe on either side of the centerline stripe and the area between is often a checkerboard pattern of blackish and green spots. ¹⁵

Common Gartersnake

Andrew Hoffman, 2007



Photo by: Andrew Hoffman CC by NC ND 2.0

Found throughout Maryland. Back is greenish, olive, brown or black with a yellow or white stripe down the centerline. May have a white to yellow stripe on either side of the centerline stripe and the area between is often a checkerboard pattern of blackish and green spots.

Eastern Ribbonsnake



Photo by: Kevin Enge CC by NC ND 2.0

Found throughout most of Maryland. Very slim snake with a distinctively narrow delicate neck, brown-capped head and very long tail. Three bright yellow or cream stripes run the length of the brown to nearly black body. Has light-colored spot in front of eye.

Dekay's Brownsnake



Illustration showing the presence of an incomplete cream-colored collar on the juvenile Dekay's Brownsnake.

Photo by: Mark Nenadov CC by 2.0

Found throughout Maryland. Small, brownish/gray snake with small, paired black spots running down the back. A thin dark line extends from the back of the head behind the eye to the base of the jaw. Juveniles have a light band across their neck. ¹⁸

Ring-necked Snakes

Photo by: Linh Phu



Found throughout Maryland. Two subspecies occur in the state:

Northern Ring-necked Snake

Back is a uniform dark gray, bluish black or brown. Has cream-to-yellow or orange neck collar and yellow belly, which may grade to red towards the tail. Has complete neck ring and belly has no or small black spots down the midline.

Photo by: Matt Close



Southern Ring-necked Snake

Back is a uniform dark gray, bluish black or brown. Has cream-to-yellow or orange neck collar and yellow belly, which may grade to red towards the tail. Has broken or notched neck ring behind head and belly has large, black half-moon shaped spots down the midline.

Eastern Milksnake

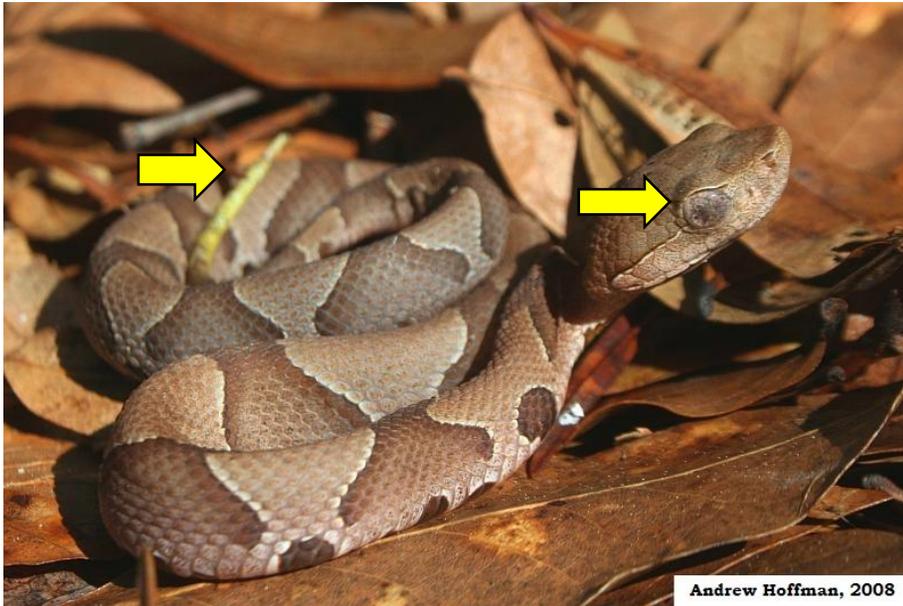


Photo by: Peter Verdonk CC by NC 2.0

Found throughout western and central Maryland. Slender snake colored tan to light brown with 32 or more blotches (broad red with black-borders) down the body in three or five rows. At the nape of the neck, there is a grey or tan Y-, V-, U, or A- shaped patch.

Juvenile Snake Comparisons

Photo by: Andrew Hoffman CC by NC ND 2.0



Andrew Hoffman, 2008

Northern Copperhead



Photo by: Bill Hubick, Maryland Biodiversity Project

North American Racer

Photo by: Robert Warren



Eastern Ratsnake

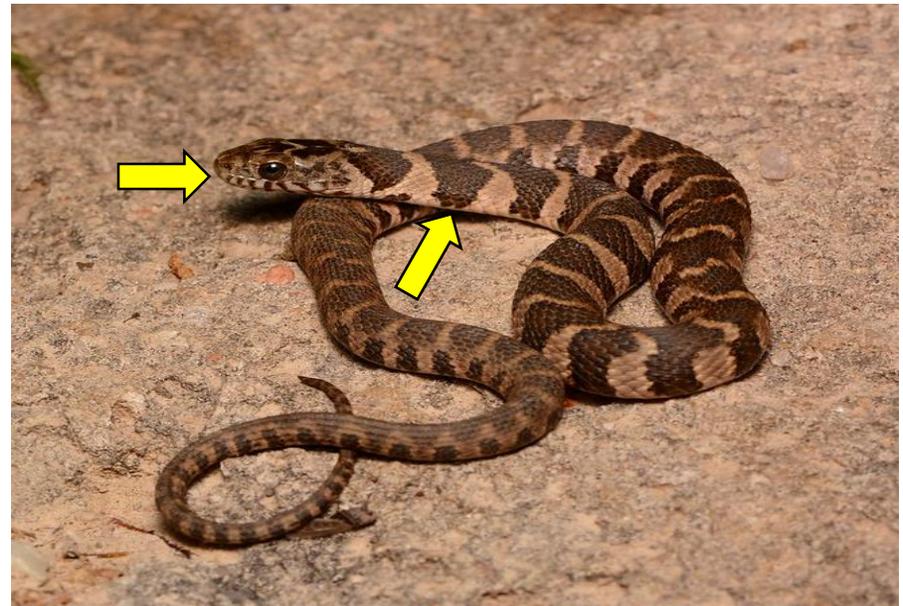


Photo by: Andrew DuBois CC by NC 2.0

Common Watersnake

For Additional Information

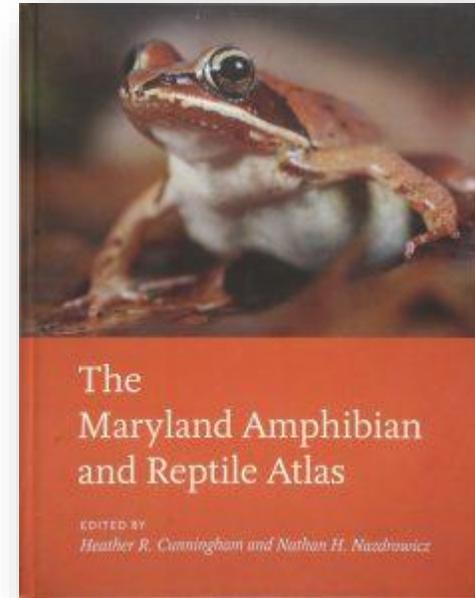
For more information on Maryland's snakes, please visit our webpage at: dnr.maryland.gov/wildlife
Additional information can be found in the following resources.

Book Resources:

- The Maryland Amphibian and Reptile Atlas
- Peterson Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America, 4th Ed

Online Resources:

- [A Key to Reptiles and Amphibians of Maryland \(PDF\)](#)
- [Captive Reptile and Amphibian Permits and Licenses \(MD\)](#)
- [Maryland Biodiversity Project](#)
- [Virginia Herpetological Society- Snake ID Guide](#)



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