

gopher snake *Pituophis catenifer*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Reptilia

Order: Squamata

Family: Colubridae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The gopher snake averages 37 to 72 inches in length. It has a yellow-tan body with dark blotches along the back. The blotches are darkest near the head and on and near the tail. The belly is yellow with black spots. A dark band is found from the eye to the angle of the jaw with a band of yellow above it. The scales are keeled (ridged). The head is wider than the neck.

BEHAVIORS

The gopher snake may be found in the prairies and sand prairies of central and northern Illinois. The gopher snake is terrestrial, but it will climb occasionally. It is active mainly during the day. This snake hides in vegetation, rock piles and mammal burrows, where it may also hunt. When disturbed it will hiss and vibrate its tail. It overwinters in small mammal burrows, under rock piles or in rock crevices. Mating occurs in April or May. In June or July the female deposits about 10 eggs in rotten wood or in the ground. Several females may lay their eggs in the same place. The eggs stick to each other as they are being laid. Eggs hatch in August or September. The gopher snake eats small mammals, birds and bird eggs. It constricts prey items to kill them.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

none

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; sand prairie

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