Graham's crayfish snake

Regina grahamii

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

Features

Graham's crayfish snake is 18 to 28 inches long. Its back is brown or dark olive and it has a broad yellow stripe along each lower side. The belly is yellowish and may or may not have markings. The scales are keeled (ridged). Graham's crayfish snake is the only striped water snake in Iowa. It is the smallest and most docile of Iowa's four water snakes.

Natural History

Graham's crayfish snake lives in ponds, streams, sloughs, and marshes. It eats mainly crayfish that have just shed their exoskeleton, but also will eat other crustaceans, amphibians, and fish. It is semiaquatic, hiding under stones or debris, or in crayfish burrows or other burrows along the water's edge. Unlike other water snakes, it is not aggressive. It basks on rocks and in branches overhanging the water. It is active in the day, except during hot summer months when it becomes nocturnal. This snake may flatten its body when disturbed and/or release large amounts of nasty-smelling musk from glands at the base of the tail. It overwinters in crayfish burrows. Mating occurs in spring. The female gives birth to nine to 40 young in late summer, the number depending on her size (the larger her size, the greater the number of eggs) and age. Populations of this snake seem to be declining in abundance.

Habitats

bottomland forests; natural lakes and prairie marshes; constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs; interior rivers and streams

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

scattered throughout Iowa in suitable habitats

Bibliography

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