diamondback water snake

Nerodia rhombifera

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

Features

The diamondback water snake is 30 to 48 inches long. Its back has a pattern of dark chainlike markings on a background of lighter brown or dirty yellow. The yellow belly is marked with black or brown spots. The scales are keeled (ridged). It is one of the largest of Iowa's water snakes.

Natural History

The diamondback water snake lives in lakes, rivers, ditches, ponds, and sloughs. It eats fish and amphibians. It is aquatic, but may be seen basking in the sunshine on limbs over water. It is essentially nocturnal in the hot summer months, but individuals may be active during the day in spring and fall. 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. Mating occurs in spring. Fourteen to 60 young are born to each female in late summer or early fall. The number of young produced is related directly to the size (the larger her size, the greater the number of eggs) and age of the female.

Habitats

Mississippi River; interior rivers and streams; bottomland forests

Iowa Status

threatened; native

Iowa is along the northern extreme of its range. It is associated with backwater areas along large rivers.

Iowa Range

southeast corner of Iowa

Bibliography

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