

endangered

Have You Seen Me?



The Kirtland's Snake once made its home in western Pennsylvania, with most historical records from Allegheny, Butler, Jefferson, and Westmoreland counties. Now an endangered species, this elusive snake has not been documented in the state for over thirty years.

The Kirtland's is a small, stout snake reaching two-feet in length. The dorsal (back) coloration varies from gray to reddish brown, with four rows of dark brown or black, round, alternating blotches. The belly is bright red or orange and is bordered on each side by a row of dark spots. The head is black or dark gray with white on the chin, throat and labial scales around the mouth. The scales on the dorsal surface are strongly keeled. Juveniles are similar to adults, but may have a darker tone on the dorsum with less conspicuous blotches. This species may be confused with other snakes of Pennsylvania including the redbelly snake, ringneck snake, and queen snake. A unique characteristic of the Kirtland's that may distinguish it from other species is the way it flattens out its body when disturbed.

The Kirtland's snake spends the majority of its time in mammal and crayfish burrows, and under leaf litter, logs, rocks, and human debris. It is primarily found around open wetlands, marshes, canals, wet prairies, wet pastures, forested wetlands, and floodplains. Urban ponds, parks, and vacant lots may also be home to these snakes. Though the Kirtland's may be found near water, it is one of the least aquatic of all water snakes and will rarely be seen swimming in open water.

The continued growth of industry and loss of habitat (drainage, encroachment, and destruction of wetlands) has contributed to the decline of this species. The limited distribution and highly elusive nature of this species makes determining its existence in the state challenging to biologists. With the help of the public and the preservation of wetland habitat, we hope to determine if the Kirtland's snake still exists in Pennsylvania.

How you can help:

If you find a snake you believe may be a Kirtland's Snake, photograph the animal, document the place and time, and send in your report.

Identification Help:

To find more information on how to identify a Kirtland's Snake, including photographs and more characteristics, please visit <http://paherps.com>

Reports:

Please send any information, reports, and photographs to Tim Maret of the Pennsylvania Herpetological Atlas. <http://paherpatlas.org>