

special concern

Have You Seen Me?



The Mountain Earth Snake is one of the smallest and least known species of snake found in Pennsylvania. Most people have never heard of them let alone seen one. Their extremely secretive habits combined with a reduced range limited to a few mountainous areas of the state, allow these gentle, little snakes to go unnoticed by most.

Mountain earth snakes are small, stout-bodied animals with a short, pointy head not distinct from the body, a short tail, and a smooth, polished looking appearance. The background coloration is variable; reddish brown, plain brown or gray and the dorsal (back) scales are very weakly keeled. A pattern, if present, consists of small black dots that form rows the length of the body and a few specimens may have a light stripe running down the center of the back. The belly is generally white to pale yellow and occasionally edged with pink, and the chin and upper lip is white.

Forested uplands are home to the mountain earth snake where they typically can be found under rocks on moderate to steep rocky hillsides. They can also be found under leaf litter, rocks and other debris along logging roads; especially after heavy rains. Cover objects provide shelter not only for the snakes but for their chief prey: earthworms.

The mountain earth snake could be confused with the eastern worm snake, the northern brown snake, and the eastern earth snake. The worm snake has very smooth scales (mountain earth slightly keeled scales) and tiny eyes, the brown snake has sharply keeled scales, and the eastern earth snake, which originally occurred in the extreme southeastern part of the state, is believed to be extirpated.

Inoffensive and docile are good ways to describe the disposition of the mountain earth snake. They never attempt to bite, but may expel musk or defecate when handled. And some individuals may, from a personal experience, rear-up their bodies and gape their mouths at a would be predator. This behavior is rare, however.

Due to its secretive nature, it's possible that the mountain earth snake may inhabit neighboring areas of its known range but has gone undetected. Studies need to be done to determine, more accurately, their current range and status within Pennsylvania. Because of the lack of data pertaining to the mountain earth snake, it's listed as a species of special concern in PA.

How you can help:

If you find a snake you believe may be a Mountain Earth 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 Mountain Earth 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>