

EASTERN MASSASAUGA RATTLESNAKE

Species at Risk

In Canada, the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake (*Sistrurus catenatus*) occurs in Ontario in four separate populations. They are the Bruce Peninsula, Georgian Bay, Windsor and Niagara area populations. This snake is a threatened species and is at risk of becoming endangered.

The Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake is a small rattlesnake with a thick body and a rattle on the tip of the tail. This is the only venomous snake in Ontario. The Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake is brownish-red to grey in colour with darker brown to black markings along its back and sides with a black belly. It has heat-sensing pits on both sides of the head between the eye and the nostril. The Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake gives birth to live young.

This species has adapted to many different ecotypes including prairies, peatlands, limestone karsts, wetlands, forests and bedrock barrens. For all ecotypes, this species requires suitable quality underground hibernation habitat, gestation sites and feeding areas and the ability to move between these habitats during the active season.

Threats include human persecution (killing), accidental killing by farming activities, habitat loss including loss of hibernation and gestation habitat features, fragmentation of habitat caused by human development such as roads and housing and road mortality. Some natural predators include hawks, owls, harriers and coyotes.

It is illegal to search for, harass or capture a species at risk or destroy their habitat.

Picture courtesy of Rob Tervo

References: COSEWIC Status Report on the Massasauga in Canada, 2002

