THE GENUS THAMNOPHIS, PART V *THAMNOPHIS (RADIX) BUTLERI*

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## DISTRIBUTION

*Thamnophis butleri* is found in the extreme southern part of Ontario, eastern Michigan, eastern Indiana, western Ohio and eastern Wisconsin (see Map 1). Its habitat consists chiefly of open, prairie-like areas, and of marshes. It is almost always found in the immediate vicinity of water. Carpenter found that the presence of a dense growth of grasses and sedges in an area devoid of bushes, but near water, was the type of habitat preferred by this snake.


## DESCRIPTION

The length of this rather small snake varies from 38 to 69 cm for adults. Its dorsal ground color is olive-brown to black with a double row of black spots between the dorsal and the lateral stripes. The stripes are yellow to orange. The lateral stripes are on the third and the adjacent halves of row 2 and 4. The anal scale is single. This snake could be confused with *Thamnophis brachystoma*, but *Thamnophis brachystoma* normally has 17 mid-dorsal scale rows, *Thamnophis butleri* 19. Its behaviour is very gentle. It is not very fast moving, is readily caught and when captured offers little or no resistance. It is not
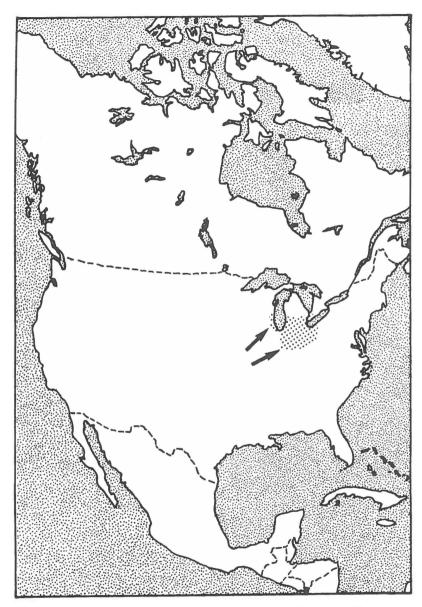
defensive and normally will not bite.

## THE VIVARIUM

The vivarium in which I keep these snakes, is
40x40x40 cm (lwh), with a 15 Watt light bulb for
light and heat. The temperature is between 30
degrees and 40 degrees C during summer, about 22
degrees C during winter. As *Thamnophis butleri*
is a water loving snake, a water basin is neces-
sary. I use a small tank with a diameter of 14 cm.
As substrate I prefer peat. I decorated the cage
with plastic plants, which prove to be more last-
ing than real ones. The animals are able to hide
in and under some stumps on which they also can
climb.

## FOOD

In the wild, these snakes live on a diet of earth-
worms, frogs, insects (?), field mice (probably
nestlings), leeches and salamanders. Earthworms
make up the largest part of their diet, as has
been proven by field studies. In captivity they
also take food items like small fish, while insects
are refused. I mainly offer them smelt, sprinkled
with vitamins. As not all of them are fond of this
food, I also offer them whiting and earthworms
sometimes. On this diet, they do not feed extremly
well.

## BREEDING

The mating ritual is the same as with other
species of *Thamnophis*: the male crawls over the
back of the female, tongueflicking and trying to
stimulate the female. He tries to curl his tail

Map 1. Distribution area of *Thamnophis radix butleri*.

around that of the female to introduce his hemipenis in her cloaca. In nature, mating usually occurs in April and May, young are born in summer or early autumn. Litters are not very large: according to Wright & Wright from 4 to 16, with an average of 8-10. Young measure about 17 cm. I have not been able to breed this snake myself, but I have been told that the young don't eat very well and consequently dont't grow very fast either. Of course, this is a rather small snake, but it may also be possible that this poor food acceptance is caused by the difference between the offered food items (probably fish) and their natural food preference (chiefly earthworms and leeches).

CONCLUSION

*Thamnophis radix butleri* is a rather small species that is very suited for a small vivarium. When fed on earthworms, they eat well and don't smell. They are easy to handle and tame well.

LITERATURE

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