

**THE EASTERN HOGNOSE SNAKE**  
***HETERODON PLATYRHINOS***  
**LATREILLE, 1801**

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#### HABITAT

There are three species of Hognose snakes found in the United States. By far, the most common is the eastern hognose snake or *Heterodon platyrhinos* (Latreille). This particular species is found throughout the eastern United States.

The Eastern hognose occupies a variety of habitats including wooded hillsides, cultivated fields, meadows and most commonly, areas with dry sandy soil. These habitats coincide with those of toads, the principal food of Hognose snakes.

#### DESCRIPTION

Coloration in Hognose snakes varies considerably, but usually consists of a ground colour of tan, yellow, gray, or reddish brown, with dark blotches on the back. In some areas, plain black specimens are frequently found.

The most distinguished characteristic of the snake is its upturned snout. In fact, the name 'Hognose snake' refers to this characteristic, which resembles the upturned snout found on farmyard hogs. The purpose of this upturned snout is to enable the Hognose to burrow through the sandy soil in search of toads. The Eastern hognose snake reaches a maximum length of cm, with most adults averaging between cm.

#### MATING

The Hognose snakes usually mate in early to mid spring. The eggs are laid around June or July. Hatching takes place in August or September after a 55-60 day incubation period. Hatchlings average between cm in total length.

Generally females lay between 6-40 eggs in a single clutch with a maximum recorded clutch size of 61. This figure may seem a bit exaggerated, but it is quite possible for a large female to lay this many eggs. Especially if one considers the case of a locally caught female that laid 49 eggs last year. This female was just under 90 cm in length, but had an exceptional girth.

#### TYPICAL BEHAVIOUR

In addition to the typical upturned snout, most Hognose snakes have a second and more interesting characteristic. This, being their formidable behaviour when approached in the wild. At first the snake will flatten and spread its neck, inflate its body with air and hiss loudly. It is

because of these antics that the snake has received such names as spreading adder, puff adder, and blow viper.

If this display of aggression fails to scare away the intruder, then the snake resorts to its second line of defense. In that case the Hognose snake rolls over on its back, slowly opens its mouth, lolls out its tongue and 'plays dead'. If picked up, the snake remains limp and motionless, even when roughly handled. This act of playing dead is quickly given away by turning the snake over on its belly, whereby it promptly rolls over on its back.

If you are interested in learning more about these colorful and interesting snakes, then you might wish to consult the following books.

#### REFERENCES

- Barbour, Roger W., 1971. *Amphibians and Reptiles of Kentucky*. The University of Kentucky press, Lexington, Kentucky.
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- Cochran, Doris M. & Goin, Coleman J., 1970. *The New Field Book of reptiles and Amphibians*. G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York.

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