



**Natural Heritage
& Endangered Species
Program**

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

**Smooth Greensnake
*Opheodrys vernalis***

State Status: **None**
Federal Status: **None**

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: The Smooth Greensnake is a slender-bodied snake that ranges in length from 12 to 20 inches, reaching a maximum of 26 inches. This difficult-to-confuse species in Massachusetts is identified by its unpatterned and green dorsal coloration, smooth scales, and white to pale yellow ventral coloration. Smooth Greensnakes also have a long and tapering prehensile tail.

Smooth Greensnakes emerge in April or May and mate by late spring or summer. Females lay one to two clutches of four to six eggs, which are laid from June to September. Nests are located in rotting vegetation, beneath logs or flat stones, and in small mammal burrows. Young snakes are dark olive or blue-gray in coloration. Adult and young snakes are active until late September when they spend the rest of the year hibernating below ground. Preferred hibernacula include rodent burrows and subsurface ant chambers. It is not uncommon for Smooth Greensnakes to overwinter communally with Ring-necked Snakes, Dekay's Brownsnakes, Red-bellied Snakes, and Common Gartersnakes.

Smooth Greensnakes are active during the day and feed on a variety of arthropods (crickets, grasshoppers, caterpillars, beetles, spiders, centipedes and millipedes).

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE: The species is not well documented in Massachusetts. Based on anecdotal reports, it would appear that the species has a statewide distribution. Their densities are not well known and they are not uniformly distributed. Most reports are from Mount Greylock, the lowlands of the Connecticut River Valley, coastal areas, Cape Cod, and the Islands.

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: Smooth Greensnakes may be found in a range of lightly forested habitats such as



Photo by Bill Byrne, MassWildlife

pastures, old fields, wet meadows, peat lands, bogs, coastal grasslands, edges of marshes and forests, pine barrens, blueberry barrens, grassy hilltops, rocky slopes, and open woodlands.

THREATS: The species has declined significantly in abundance during the second part of the 20th century; however, the exact causes are unknown. It is thought that it is due to loss and degradation of grassland habitats from land management practices (i.e., mowing frequency and insecticide use), forest succession, and development. It is also unknown if the unnaturally high densities of populations of "human commensals," such as raccoon, skunk and fox, created by development are also a threat to this snake.

CONSERVATION ACTIONS: Surveys are required to assess the abundance, distribution, and core habitat requirements of the species. It is also important to determine how populations respond to habitat management.

A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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Prepared by D.J. Paulson, 2015

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