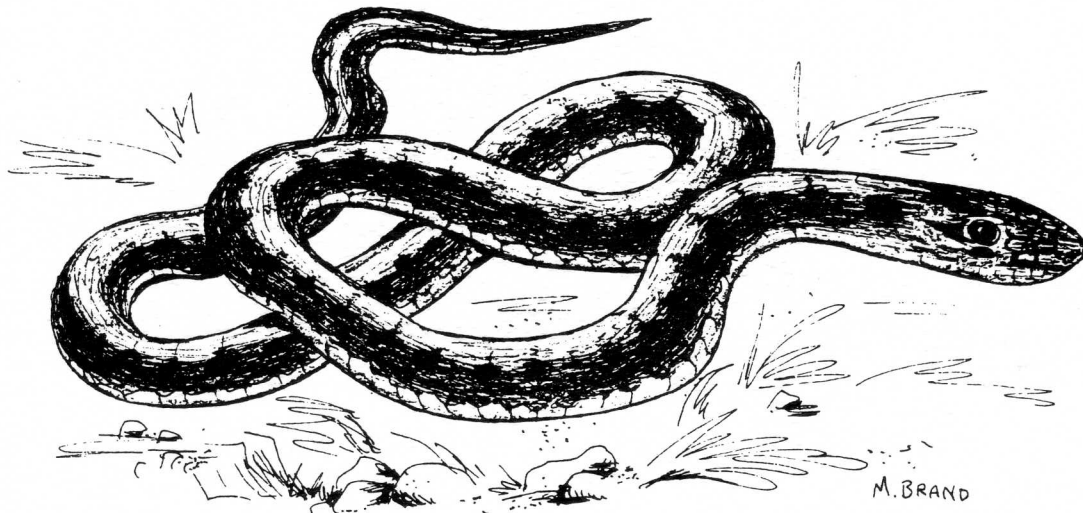


River Bend Naturalist Notebook

RIVER BEND NATURE CENTER, Faribault Minnesota

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Brown Snake

Storeria dekayi

The brown snake is one of the smallest snakes found in Minnesota. It is a close relative of another small Minnesota native, the redbelly snake. The brown snake rarely exceeds more than 14 inches in length and its average length is 9 to 13 inches.

The brown snake is native to Rice County. It inhabits moist woodland areas and feeds primarily on earthworms, slugs and insect larvae. It is a secretive creature but may be occasionally found basking on rocks.

This harmless creature defends itself primarily by maintaining a low profile, hiding in small crevices created by rock piles and forest underbrush. If threatened, however, the brown snake will flatten its body and secrete a foul smelling musk much like the garter and redbelly snakes. This encourages predators to pass them by and even humans are inclined to set them on their way. This species has

several predators including skunks, raccoons, weasels, opossums, shrews, hawks, robins, toads and other snakes.

There are several characteristics that can aid in the identification of the brown snake. There is usually a light brown mid-dorsal stripe about 4 scales in width bordered by a parallel row of small dark spots. A dark spot is found on each side of the neck and under each eye. There is also a dark stripe behind the eyes. The scales of the brown snake are keeled, which means that each scale has a central ridge.

Brown snakes are active from late-April to October and give birth to an average of 14 baby snakes in August. Often they will overwinter in the same location every year, utilizing deserted ant mounds, rock piles and stone foundations. They are also known to overwinter with other species of snakes such as garter snakes, redbelly snakes and smooth green snakes.