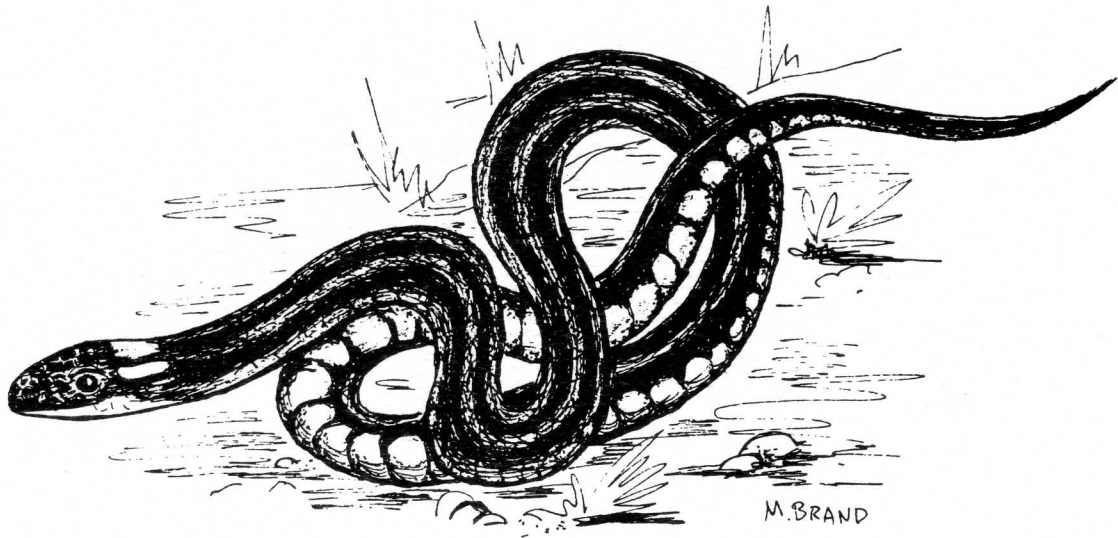


River Bend Naturalist Notebook

RIVER BEND NATURE CENTER, Faribault Minnesota

Illustrations by Moe Brand • Text by Emily Krohse, Intern Naturalist



Redbelly Snake

Storeria occipitomaculata

The redbelly snake is native to Rice County. This little snake is easily recognized by the wide, light stripe that runs down the middle of its back. It also has a noticeably reddish to orangish belly, hence the name of the snake.

There are other physical characteristics that help distinguish the redbelly snake from its close relatives. The adult redbelly can be from 8 to 16 inches long. The top of the head is darker in color than the rest of the body; sometimes three light-colored blotches can be seen on the head as well. The chin is white, but along the underside of this snake, the color is usually dark brown or gray. Young redbelly snakes are darker than the adults, often appearing black.

The redbelly snake can be found throughout Minnesota, however, they are more common in the northern half of the state. Wherever there is woodland habitat one can usually find redbelly snakes. In the woods they find the slugs, earthworms, beetle larva and snails that nourish them. Of

course, they must also watch out for their own protection - birds and small mammals would find a redbelly snake a tasty meal.

Redbelly snakes do have behaviors that may protect them from predators. Redbelly snakes have been observed to stiffen and coil up with their red belly showing, a way of playing dead. When alarmed, the redbelly releases a foul-smelling substance out of a gland in the tail, discouraging possible attackers.

The redbelly snake is active from late-April until October. During this time, they give live birth to 1 to as many as 21 baby snakes. The young snakes are on their own immediately after birth and must fend for themselves. When the weather turns colder, they look for places like rock crevices, deserted wells, and old stone foundations for over-wintering. The next spring will bring them out of their hiding places to continue their quiet existence.