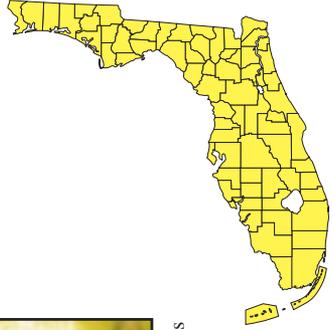


## EASTERN INDIGO SNAKE

*Drymarchon corais couperi*

**Order:** Squamata  
**Family:** Colubridae  
**FNAI Ranks:** G4T3/S3  
**U.S. Status:** Threatened  
**FL Status:** Threatened



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**Description:** A very large, stout-bodied, shiny black snake reaching lengths as great as 8 ft. (244 cm). Black ventrally, but chin, throat, and sides of head may be reddish or (rarely) white. Scales typically smooth (no ridges), though adult males have keel on front half of some scales along back; anal scale undivided. Young similar to adults though often more reddish anteriorly, 17 - 24 in. (430 - 610 mm) at hatching. When encountered, often hisses, flattens neck vertically (from side to side), and vibrates tail, but rarely bites.

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**Similar Species:** Black racer (*Coluber constrictor*), which rarely exceeds 5 ft. (152 cm), is more slender, a duller sooty black usually with a white chin and throat, and has a divided anal scale. The mostly aquatic mud snake (*Farancia abacura*) is glossy black above and can grow to 6 ft. (183 cm), but has a reddish, rarely white, belly, with the coloration encroaching the sides, and a sharp-pointed tail tip.

**Habitat:** Broad range of habitats, from scrub and sandhill to wet prairies and mangrove swamps. In northern part of range, often winters in gopher tortoise burrows in sandy uplands but forages in more hydric habitats. Requires very large tracts to survive.

**Seasonal Occurrence:** Active nearly year-round in southern Florida but winters underground farther north. Lays eggs in May and June.

**Florida Distribution:** Statewide, including Upper and Lower Keys, but rare in panhandle.

**Range-wide Distribution:** Florida and southern Georgia; formerly extended from southern South Carolina to southeastern Mississippi.

**Conservation Status:** Rare in most areas, though species has been recorded from many public lands statewide; however, whether most of these support viable populations is uncertain. Major threats are habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation, with associated highway mortality. Other threats include gassing of tortoise burrows for rattlesnakes, collection for pets, and deliberate persecution, all of which are illegal.

**Protection and Management:** Protect very large tracts (> 5000 acres = 2025 ha) of appropriate natural habitat unfragmented by roads; use prescribed fire as needed. Maintain gopher tortoise populations and dead stumps to provide natural subterranean refugia. Enforce bans on tortoise burrow gassing and on collection or molestation of snake. Avoid construction of roads through unfragmented habitat. Educate public to avoid wanton destruction of large snakes.

**Selected References:** Ashton and Ashton 1988b, Conant and Collins 1991, Ernst and Barbour 1989, Georgia DNR 1999, Lazell 1989, Moler (ed.) 1992, Mount 1975, Tenant 1997.