

Fort Matanzas

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Fort Matanzas National Monument



Eastern Indigo Snake

(*Drymarchon corais couperi*)

Being good-looking isn't always an advantage. Being good-looking and mild-tempered is one of the reasons the glossy, blue-black Eastern Indigo Snake is listed as a threatened species.



This beautiful snake is the longest and largest non-poisonous snake native to North America. The record length is over 8 feet, although most average 5 to 6 feet (1 ½ to 2 meters). But, because of its large size and docile disposition, they are in great demand as pets, and thus were over-collected. Even now that they are protected, they are still sometimes collected illegally and sold overseas, so that this gentle snake, which historically lived throughout the Southeastern United States from South Carolina to Mississippi, is now found only in Florida and the narrow band of coastal Georgia.

The indigo snake preys upon other snakes (including venomous species like rattlesnakes), frogs, salamanders, toads, small mammals, birds, and occasionally young turtles. Instead of strangling their prey like many snakes do, they use their heavy bodies to hold the prey and they swallow their prey whole.

The indigo snake lives primarily in well-drained sandy soils and dunes, often referred to as *scrub*. This is another reason the indigo snake is threatened—loss of habitat as more and more people move to Florida and more land is cleared for houses.

You will see this type of scrub habitat as you walk our nature trail. This habitat is the same as that of the American gopher tortoise, and in fact, they have a close connection. The indigo snake will use abandoned gopher tortoise burrows for nesting, refuge from hot and bad weather, and for hunting grounds.

Nesting begins in November and continues until March. A typical nest consists of a clutch of only 8-9 eggs which will hatch in about three months. While not truly hibernating, the indigo snake typically stays in its den throughout the winter, but will come out on warm, sunny days. Like all reptiles, the indigo needs the sun to increase its own body temperature.

The fall is a good time to observe these snakes along the nature trail hunting in the leaves or sunning themselves before they disappear into their dens for the winter. If you are lucky enough to see one, please just watch it from a distance and leave it alone. This beautiful, non-aggressive, non-poisonous snake poses no threat to humans.

Remember that all plants and animals in the park are protected by state and federal laws. Please observe them from a distance.

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