NR-FS-1143-A
Revised 1993

FISH & WILDLIFE
Minnesota Extension Service, University of Minnesota

NON-POINSONOUS SNAKES

James Kitts and Chris Goodwin

There are 17 species of snakes in Minnesota. Of these, 15 are non-poinsonous. The two poisonous snakes are very rare anywhere near urban areas. Several non-poinsonous snakes, including garter snakes, adapt especially well to the suburbs. These snakes are beneficial to humans because they feed a wide variety of pests and rodents

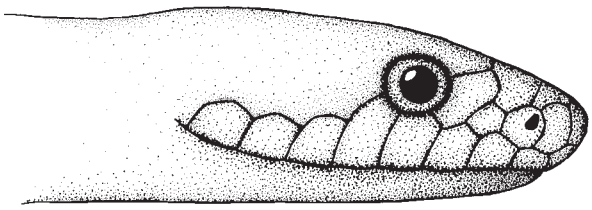

Figure 1. Non-poinsonous snakes have a round eye pupil and have no pit between the eye and the nostril.

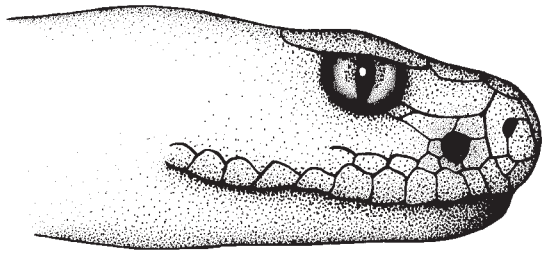

Figure 2. There are only two species of poisonous snakes in Minnesota. This rattlesnake head shows a "cat-eye" elliptical pupil and a large loreal pit, characteristic of pit vipers.

Snakes hibernate in groups, usually in holes in the ground or in the foundations of buildings. During the first warm days of spring, snakes leave their dens to sun themselves. Later, they return to their dens for the night. Once soil temperatures rise above 50 degrees snakes leave their hibernation holes for the summer. After that, only a few snakes will remain in the immediate area.

Snakes sometimes get into homes. If this happens, the best way to find them is to put a pile of damp cloths on the floor and cover it with a dry cloth, to slow evaporation. Snakes seek out warm, damp, dark places and are likely to crawl under the pile of damp cloths where they can easily be swept or brushed into a container and then removed.

CONTROL

Exclusion is the only long-day term means of controlling snake problems in the home. Repair any holes in the foundation or outside wall of the house. Snakes can crawl through very small openings (about 1/4 inch) so the repair must be throrough to ensure success. Practice snake prevention by finding the hole that snakes use to enter their den. Then dig it up and fill it in. Most snakes can't dig their own holes so they must rely on existing holes. Therefore, filling in the entry holes of dens will prevent snakes from hibernating in the yard.

Snakes require cover such as long grass, weed edges along walls or fences, or thick shrubbery. Minimize this cover and snakes will move elsewhere to find a more suitable habitat. Keep lawns reasonably short, trim weed lines, and space out shrubbery.

Discourage snakes by placing a commercial product called "Tack Trap" or Pine Tar Gum around areas that require protection. These products are thick, sticky liquids which snakes refuse to crawl over. The substances irritate the scales of adults and may entrap smaller snakes.

Use fencing to effectively block off small areas. It would be impractical and expensive to snake-fence an entire yard, but limited fencing works well to exclude snakes from small areas, such as a play area for small

children. Make the fence out of heavy duty hardware cloth, 36 in ches wide with 1/4-inch or smaller mesh. Bury the fence 6 inches and slant it outward at approximately a 30-degree angle. Make the entrance gate with equally fine screening and use tight jamb gaskets to prevent entry between the gate and the fence. The gate should have a bottom sweep to prevent entry beneath the gate and should swing into the enclosed area.

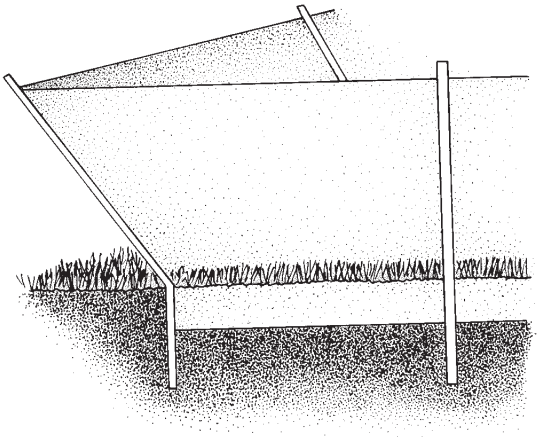

Figure 3. Snake-proof fence

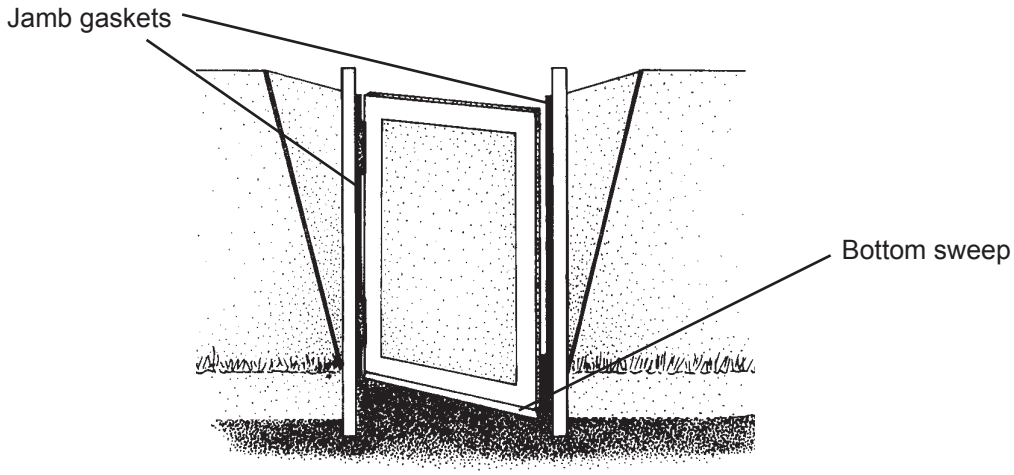

Figure 4. Gate with bottom sweep and tight jamb gaskets

REFERENCE

Byford, James L. 1983. Non-Poisonous Snakes. In Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage, pp. F7-F11, ed. Robert M. Timm. Great Plains Agricultural Council Wildlife Resources Committee and Nebraska Cooperative Extension Service.

Produced by the Educational Development System, Minnesota Extension Service, University of Minnesota.

Printed on recycled paper with 10% postconsumer waste

MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
NATURAL RESOURCES