

Northern Water Snakes

Look carefully! From April to October, you might spot Pennsylvania's most common water snake. The non-venomous northern water snake likes to be close to water and good hiding places, like rocks, logs, and brush piles.

The northern water snake can be seen in a variety of colors. On some adults, the patterns can blend into the background color, making them appear completely black.



Northern water snake eating a fish.

Nature's Balance

Northern water snakes are important to the balance of nature because they eat small fish, frogs, toads, and crayfish and are food for other predators.



Northern water snakes mating.

Mating Habits

Water snakes wrap their tails together when they mate. You might see this twist of snakes in or out of the water.



Copperhead



Northern water snake

Mistaken Identity

Don't confuse a harmless northern water snake with a venomous northern copperhead or eastern cottonmouth. Copperheads have obviously flattened, triangle-shaped heads, while water snakes have oval heads. Don't worry about eastern cottonmouths (also known as water moccasins) – they don't live in Pennsylvania. The northern water snake may also be confused with the non-venomous eastern milk snake.



Eastern milk snake



venomous



non-venomous

Venomous vs. Non-Venomous

Copperheads (and all other venomous snakes in Pennsylvania) have vertical pupils like a cat's eye. Our non-venomous snakes have round pupils like we do.

If You See a Snake

As with all wild animals, you should never handle northern water snakes. Although they aren't venomous, they will bite to defend themselves. Don't hurt water snakes and they won't hurt you!

I Spy...Slithering Snakes

You might see snakes:

- **Basking** in the sun to raise their body temperature in spring and fall. In summer, cold-blooded snakes prefer the shade so they don't overheat.
- **Growing** from the length of six to ten inches when they're born in July and August, to two to three feet as adults.
- **Hunting** by pursuing their prey in the water, under rocks and through crevices, then swallowing it head first.



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