Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake
Biology & Ecology

- Small to medium sized pit viper adult size 2 ½ to 3 ft
- Diet: Primarily meadow voles and may include frogs, insects and even other snakes
- 5- 20 live young born in the fall, no eggs are laid
- Life expectancy: 14 to 18 years

Heat sensing pits create a thermal image of the prey
Snakes are born with only one rattle. Additional rattles come with each molting of the skin, 2-4 times per year.
Crayfish burrows are used as overwintering shelters (hibernacula)
Massasauga Range

Historic Range
Habitat

- Found in fens, wet meadows and floodplain forests during the spring, fall and winter.
- Migrate upland to drier sites in the summer.
- Open, sunny areas intermixed with shaded areas are ideal for thermoregulation.
In the presence of a Massasauga?

- Give them distance and respect
- Do not handle or pose with the snake
- Keep children at a safe distance and keep pets on a leash
- They are timid and will usually flee if disturbed
- If bitten, remain calm and seek medical attention immediately
- 25-50% bites are “dry”
- Rarely life-threatening
- Report observations to the DNR
Massasauga look-alikes

Eastern Fox Snake

Eastern Milk Snake

Eastern Hognose Snake

Northern Water Snake
Survey & Monitoring

- In 2010 and 2011 Massasauga surveys were conducted at Matthaei Botanical Gardens by Ecological Consulting Group
- Objective: verify and document Massasauga population status, improve both survey protocols and snake habitat management
The Surveys found:

- A healthy population of 27 massasaugas including 8 gravid (pregnant) females

- Other Special Concern species:
  - northern leopard frog
  - Blandings turtle
The massasauga is a keystone species and fits into nature like a puzzle piece.

- Many animals depend on it for food (hawks, eagles, herons and foxes)
- It helps keep rodent and insect populations in check

Remove it and the ecosystem in which it lives becomes poorer
Massasaugas are rare throughout most of their range.

Greatest threats include:

- Habitat loss
- Habitat degradation and fragmentation
- Roads
- Draining of wetlands for agriculture
- Residential development
- Fear and persecution
- Invasive species
Massasauga Habitat Restoration Work:
Fleming Creek Floodplain, Fens and uplands
Conservation & Management

- Habitat protection of suitable wetlands
- Sensitive land management practices
  - Invasive plant removal
  - Seeding & planting of native plants
  - Fire management
    - Timing
    - Refuges
- Education