

# Wildlife of the Month



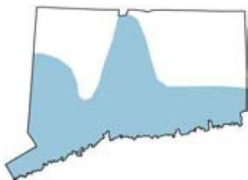
*Photographed by Greg Decker in the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve*

## Eastern Rat Snake

*Pantherophis alleghaniensis*

### At-a-Glance

- Length: 47-72 inches
- Peak Breeding Activity: April-June
- Incubation: 65-70 days
- Clutch Size: 12-20 eggs
- Typical Foods: mice and rats, chipmunks, moles, and other small rodents
- Distribution in Connecticut



The eastern (or black) rat snake is sometimes feared, partly because of its size. The fact is that eastern rat snakes are harmless, non-venomous snakes that play an important role in controlling destructive rodents.

### Habitat and Habits

An essentially forest-loving snake, the eastern rat snake is an accomplished climber and is often found high in trees, frequently taking shelter in woodpecker holes and other cavities.

When first encountered, most black rats freeze in position, blending in with their surroundings. Although some offer little or no resistance when first captured, many will vibrate their tail rapidly and strike repeatedly. When picked up, they usually coil tightly about the arm and discharge a foul-smelling substance from the anal scent glands.

### Reproduction and Care of the Young

Soon after winter hibernation, snakes will begin the mating process. The female will then lay her eggs in a hidden area, such as under hollow logs or leaves, or in abandoned burrows.