

Snakes in Basements and Buildings

by Andrew L. Shiels and Kelly L. Bryan

Ever since St. Patrick drove the snakes from Ireland, people have been trying to rid their homes of snakes. Most of the time, people and snakes do not meet. However, snakes occasionally frequent buildings in search of food and shelter. When people come into contact with snakes, often their first instinct is to harm or kill the unsuspecting creature. Although there is usually a certain degree of fear associated with such an encounter, there shouldn't be. That's because the majority of snakes encountered by people are nonvenomous, harmless and beneficial. For example, the species most commonly found in or around buildings are the black rat snake, eastern milk snake, and the northern ring neck snake. Still, it is understandable that when a snake is discovered near or in a dwelling, people seek a quick way to remove it.

Many people wonder, after years without seeing a snake, why one suddenly appears in or around a building. The most obvious answer is that the snake has located a food source, usually small mammals. Also, shelter and reproductive areas, such as mulch piles, could be available, thus attracting snakes to dwellings.

To get snakes out of your building, you usually have to remove them physically or wait until they leave on their own. Unfortunately, there is no magic potion that prevents a snake from entering a building. But there are preventive measures that may be used to lessen the chances of

snakes entering your home. A review of the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission pamphlet *Snakes in Pennsylvania* can help you distinguish between venomous and nonvenomous species. If you are uncomfortable with removing a snake yourself, contact a local animal removal specialist. Remember the following when dealing with snakes in the home:

- Most snakes are poor climbers and do not routinely scale vertical surfaces, so seal all openings and cracks, especially at ground level.
- There is no known effective snake repellent that can be used safely without danger to humans and pets.



Northern ringneck snake

- A few simple housecleaning measures usually keep snakes away from buildings and reduce the likelihood of a snake entering your home. These include a) Place piles of firewood, stone, and rubbish far away from the building foundation; b) maintain a zone of mowed lawn around



Eastern milk snake

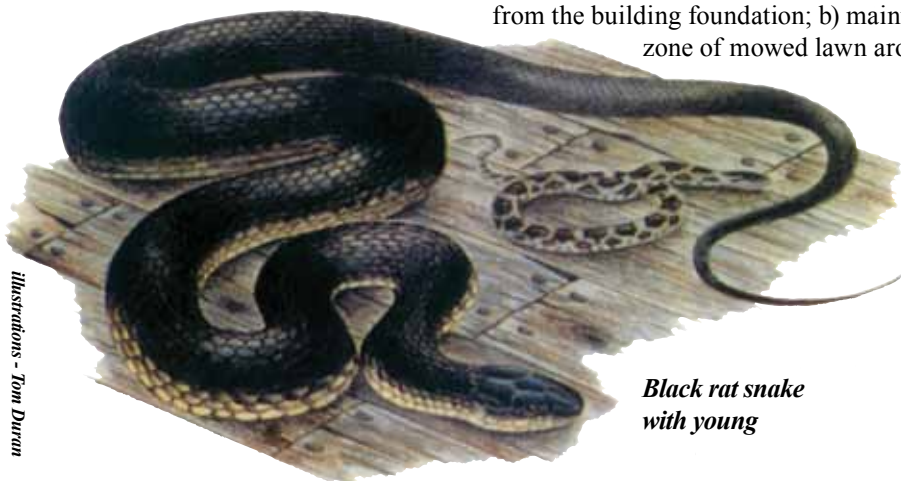
and up to the foundation; c) remove dense ground cover plantings from the foundation area; and d) eliminate potential food sources such as mice, rats, flying squirrels, and voles from the building.

When removing snakes, try using non-lethal methods. Snakes are an essential component of Pennsylvania's wildlife resources. They eat mice, rats, and even other snakes. Snakes have their place in our environment—just not in your basement.

More information

The Commission's pamphlet *Snakes in Pennsylvania* is available by sending a business-sized self-addressed, stamped envelope to: Media Production Services, PA Fish & Boat Commission, P.O. Box 67000, Harrisburg, PA 17106-7000. This publication provides an overview of snakes in the Commonwealth.

Another excellent resource on snakes and Pennsylvania's other reptiles and amphibians is the Commission's book, *Pennsylvania Amphibians & Reptiles*, by Larry L. Shaffer. This 161-page full-color book details information on the characteristics, identification, range, habitat, reproduction, and food of Pennsylvania's salamanders, frogs, toads, turtles, lizards, and snakes. The book sells for \$9.43 + \$.57 Pennsylvania state sales tax and \$2.00 for shipping and handling (total of \$12 for books sent to PA addresses). Contact the Commission's Media Production Services Section at the address above.



Black rat snake with young