

# Plains Hognose Snake *Heterodon nasicus*

## Natural History



Photo: Animal Diversity Web

**Description:** The Hognose Snake is a small, stout-bodied snake with a shovel-shaped snout. The Hognose can reach 3 feet in length. It is tan in color with a row of dark brown blotches running down its back and a dark bar that extends to the corner of the mouth and connects the eye with the head. The belly is black in color. Males have longer tails than females. When threatened the Hognose Snake will puff up and strike at the threat. If this tactic doesn't deter the predator the snake will spasm and then roll onto its back to feign death. Once the predator leaves the area, the snake rolls back onto its belly and slithers away.

**Vocalizations:** Hognose Snakes will hiss when threatened, often expanding and flattening their heads to appear more intimidating.

**Breeding:** Courtship begins in the spring and nesting occurs in July. Western Hognose Snakes are *oviparous* which means they lay eggs. The females lays 2-24 creamy, white, elliptical eggs which are buried in the sand and or in damp soil. Once the eggs are laid adult snakes do not care for the eggs or young. Young hognose snakes hatch in August and September. As soon as they hatch Hognose Snakes are able to hunt for prey.

**Distribution:** Western Hognose Snakes can be found from southwestern Manitoba, Canada to northern Mexico. In Minnesota Western Hognose Snakes are found along the western edge and in central Minnesota. Western Hognose Snakes are not found in Wisconsin.

**Habitat:** They prefer prairies, open sandy or gravelly land. They will over winter below the frost line in mammal's burrows. Due to agriculture and development, they have lost a considerable amount of habitat.

**Diet:** Hognose Snakes are crepuscular, hunting mainly in the early morning and late evening. Toads make up 80% of their diet. The snake uses its shovel-like snout to dig in sandy soil to find its prey. Hognose Snakes are considered to be rear-fanged colubrids, and do not pose any danger to humans. The saliva they excrete is considered toxic to prey (frogs and toads) but not dangerous to humans. Another adaption on the snakes' part is the ability to negate the toxins found in the toads' skin.

**Lifespan:** The lifespan range is 9-19 in wild and 15-20 in captivity.

**Conservation Status:** In Minnesota the Western Hognose Snake is a species of Special Concern. Predators include hawks, crows, fox, coyotes, raccoon, and larger snakes. Hognose Snakes are collected for the pet trade. However, the primary threat to this species is loss of habitat.

