

## Butler's Gartersnake (*Thamnophis butleri*)

### Status and Protection

Within Ontario, the Butler's Gartersnake is listed as a threatened species and receives protection in Ontario under the *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA) and in Canada under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). The *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act* (FWCA) also offers the Butler's Gartersnake special protection in Ontario. Protection prohibits actions such as killing, harming, harassing, possessing, selling or trading.

### Description

The Butler's Gartersnake (*Thamnophis butleri*) belongs to a longitudinally striped group of snakes from the family Colubridae. They are small (adults grow to 380 to 730 mm in length) and stout-bodied with three distinct yellow lines on a background colour of black. The two lines positioned laterally are located on scale rows 2, 3 and 4. Their head is short and broad and blends into the main body giving the appearance of no neckline. There is a chestnut-brown longitudinal stripe along the outer  $\frac{1}{4}$  edge of the venter that extends onto the first one or two scale rows of its sides.

Butler's Gartersnakes are normally active from late March to late October. They hibernate over winter underground in small mammal or crayfish burrows. After emerging from hibernation, males actively seek out females to commence breeding activities. Females give birth in July to about four to 12 young.



Butler's Gartersnakes are non venomous and rarely, if ever, bite when handled. However they are known to spin their abdomens when handled and give off an unpleasant musk odour.

### Habitat

The natural habitat of Butler's Gartersnakes include wet, open areas such as prairies, pastures, fields in parks, marsh borders, and grassy edges of streams or canals. They can also occur along railroad embankments and vacant city lots. Some of the largest populations of Butler's Gartersnakes have been found in grassy, litter filled vacant lots in urban areas, due to habitat fragmentation of their former range. The rapid development of urban lands has undoubtedly eliminated this snake from many of its former locations.

## Distribution

In Canada, the Butler's Gartersnake is found only in southwestern Ontario. There are 20 known locations in Ontario but half of these have very low numbers and more than half of the sites have not been verified for over a decade and there is little historic data concerning population sizes. Over the last 30 years loss of habitat in southwestern Ontario may have eliminated many of these sites<sup>i</sup>.

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<sup>i</sup> URS Corporation and LGL Limited. 2009. Butler's Gartersnake (*Thamnophis butleri*) Impact Assessment Report for the Detroit International River Crossing Study.