

# Common Kingsnakes and the Department of Defense



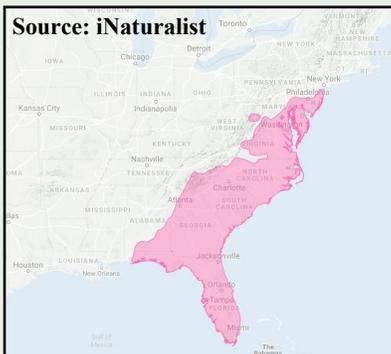
Picture by Paul Block

The Common Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getula*) is one of the more commonly encountered snakes on military installations. The Latin word *getula* is derived from the Latin word *Getulus*, which refers to the Getulian people of Morocco. The chain-like pattern on this snake was prevalent in Getulian culture.

**Description:** Adults are typically 36 to 48 in (90 to 122 cm) in total length. This snake species is colored black and covered with approximately 15-44 rows of white to yellow crossbars in the Eastern subspecies (*L. g. getula*) or spots in the Florida subspecies (*L. g. floridana*). If present, crossbars are often incomplete or broken on the body and not divided on the tail. The belly is patterned with a highly irregular, alternating series of black-and-white patches. The head is small and is covered with a varying number of white or yellow spots. Juveniles are patterned the same as adults.

**Range:** Common Kingsnakes range from eastern West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and southern New Jersey southward through the southeastern Atlantic Coastal States to southern Alabama and Florida.

**Habitat:** Common Kingsnakes are found in a variety of habitats, including hardwood forests, pine forests, old fields, and along streams in agricultural and urban areas. This species is commonly encountered along the borders of swamps and marshes. Individuals may be found under cover objects such as boards, logs, and trash piles.



Source: iNaturalist

**Behavior:** This species is active during mild weather throughout most to all of the year, with the majority of activity occurring from April-June and September-October. During this time, Common Kingsnakes are diurnal, but will shift to being crepuscular/nocturnal during summer. Over most of its range, the Common Kingsnake hibernates individually and may also aestivate during the summer. Hibernacula include hollow logs and stumps, and building foundations. Maturity is reached at 2-4 years of age and the breeding period is from April-June. Approximately 1-29 eggs are laid in rotting logs and mammal burrows. Common Kingsnakes feed on a variety of prey, with a preference for reptiles and their eggs. The Common Kingsnake is able to withstand venomous snakebites due to a venom-neutralizing factor in its blood serum.

**Military Interactions:** Common Kingsnakes are one of the top 10 most common snakes confirmed present on military sites. Base residents will often tolerate the presence of Common Kingsnakes in residential areas as a result of the snakes eating venomous snakes.

**Conservation Status:** The Common Kingsnake is not federally- or state-listed as threatened or endangered. NatureServe lists this species as G5 –Secure, and the IUCN ranks the species as Least Concern.

**Threats/Planning Considerations:** Fragmentation/destruction of habitat, human persecution, and road mortality are all threats to this species. Moreover, the Florida subspecies has inexplicably undergone drastic population declines.

Occurrence on Military Lands	
Confirmed	Potential
Confirmed present on 45 military properties (11 Air Force; 16 Army; 6 Marine Corps; and 12 Navy).	Up to an additional 76 military properties (26 Air Force; 14 Army; 2 Marine Corps; and 34 Navy).

