

# Shiawassee Refuge Snake Breaks Record

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Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge is engaged with Central Michigan University to conduct a radio-telemetry study of the eastern foxsnake. The global range of this imperiled snake is confined to the coastal plain of parts of Lake Huron, Lake Erie, and Lake Ontario. Further, this once common species has declined drastically from loss of coastal wetlands, habitat fragmentation, and persecution due to mistaken identification as a venomous species. Consequently, Michigan and Ontario rank this snake as a threatened species and it is a species of special concern in Ohio. Further, the Michigan State Wildlife Action Plan designates the eastern foxsnake as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need.



*Central Michigan University graduate researcher Kile Kucher with record breaking eastern foxsnake. Alexander McKelvy; 2009*

An article published in the most recent journal *Herpetological Review* [43(1), 2012] describes a new documented record for eastern foxsnake egg clutch size. A radiograph of one of the refuge's female snakes showed that she was carrying 34 eggs. This surpasses the previously known maximum of 29 eggs. Further, the mean clutch size for eastern fox snake is only 14.4 eggs. This female was also a near record length for the species at 5 ft 9 in. The longest measured eastern foxsnake is 5 ft 10.5 in.



*Radiograph showing eggs in line and implanted radio transmitter. Kile Kucher; 2009*

Shiawassee Refuge provides extensive areas of wetlands, grasslands, and riparian habitats occupied by the eastern foxsnake. Additionally, Shiawassee Refuge is one of only three National Wildlife Refuges in which this species is known to occur. Evidence of vigorous reproduction in this once abundant species is of particular conservation interest considering its current imperiled status.