

**DOCUMENTATION OF RATSNAKE (*Elaphe obsoleta*)
DENS IN SOUTHEASTERN MINNESOTA**

A REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL
RESOURCES - NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM

Bruce J. Brecke

Background:

The ratsnake, *Elaphe obsoleta*, attains the northwestern extremity of its range in southeastern Minnesota, and documentation of this species' presence here has been restricted to four specimens collected since its discovery in southern Houston County in 1942. Accordingly, it remains the most elusive of Minnesota's large snakes: no new specimens have been taken since 1982 in spite of at least two herpetological surveys (1984, MHS; 1993, MCBS). This report documents the occurrence of two overwintering populations in Houston County.

Methods:

Site I was searched as a result of information given by a local farmer. Site II was reckoned as the nearest likely habitat from locality data on a specimen tag (Bell Museum no. 1178). All specimens were hand- collected, measured, photographed, and released. Measurements were taken by placing the snake on a soft foam pad and by laying a piece of plate glass over the snake and pressing down firmly, temporarily immobilizing it. A line along the vertebral column could be traced against the glass with a grease pencil and, after removing the snake, the line could then be measured by pressing a piece of string down along its length and held against a tape measure. Large live snakes are notoriously difficult to measure accurately without traumatizing the animal, and I believe this restraining technique causes the least stress.

Site descriptions:

Location information has been removed from this document to protect ratsnake populations.

