



The  
return  
of The  
emP eror

*Drymarchon couperi*

## Purpose of this Educational Resource

The purpose of this resource is to get you involved in backyard conservation and engagement to promote healthy ecosystems and a future for all wildlife.

## About AZA & SAFE

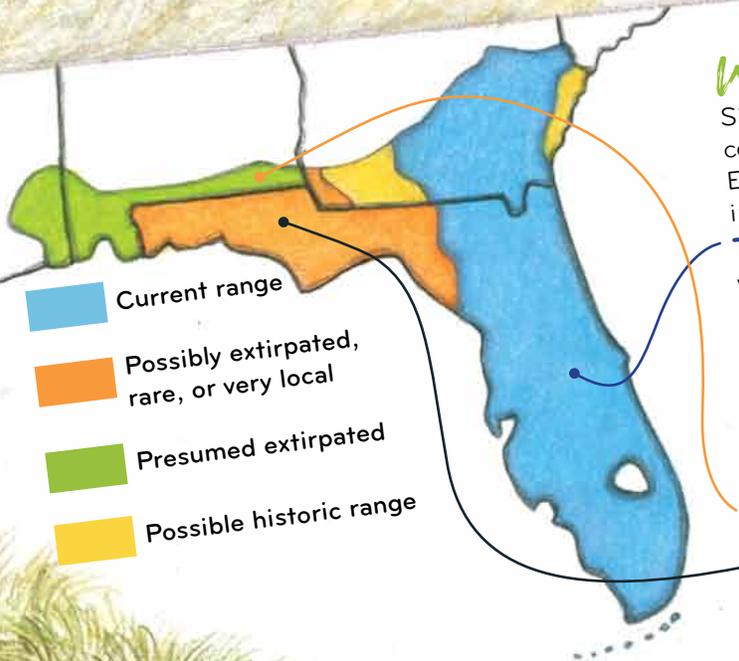
The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA): Saving Animals From Extinction (SAFE) Program brings together groups of AZA members with field-based partners to enhance conservation success for threatened species. The SAFE Program contributes to the conservation of the Eastern Indigo Snake (EIS) as set forth in the reintroduction strategy initiated by the Eastern Indigo Snake Reintroduction Committee (EISRC) and the Recovery Plan.

## The Return of the Emperor

The Eastern Indigo Snake (*Drymarchon couperi*), whose scientific name roughly translates to “**Emperor of the Forest**”, was once found in southeastern Mississippi, southern Alabama, southern Georgia, and all of Florida. This range has been reduced to just southeastern Georgia and peninsular Florida.

The primary goal of the Eastern Indigo Snake (EIS) SAFE Program is to contribute to the conservation of the Eastern Indigo Snake as set forth in the reintroduction strategy initiated by the Eastern Indigo Snake Recovery Plan (USFWS 2019).

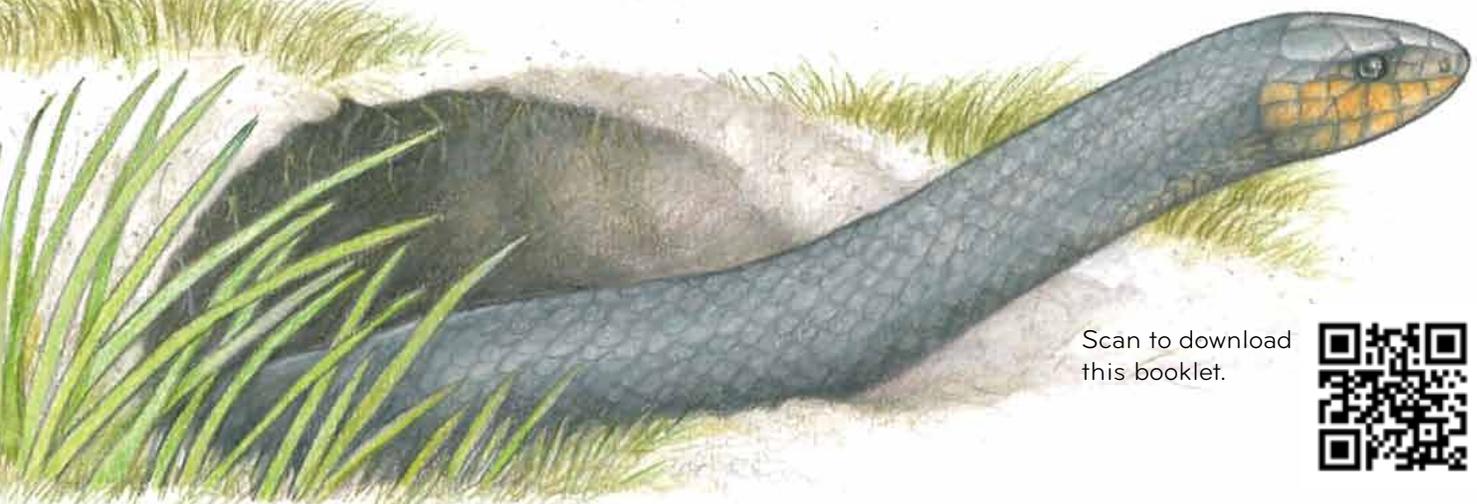
**The primary threat to Eastern Indigo Snake survival is habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation. Land development and urbanization have decreased the longleaf pine ecosystem to less than 3% of its pre-settlement range. Habitat fragmentation by roads contributes to vehicular strikes causing the death of many EIS as they travel throughout their large home range.**



## What WE are doing!

Since listing as a Threatened species in 1978, significant conservation efforts have been made to reestablish the Eastern Indigo Snake throughout parts of its historic range in southern Alabama and the Florida Panhandle.

**The Orianne Center for Indigo Conservation (OCIC)** was established in 2010 and is the main captive colony for the Eastern Indigo Snake reintroduction program. The OCIC works closely with the Eastern Indigo Snake Reintroduction Committee (EISRC) and multiple government agencies to ensure proper management of the captive Eastern Indigo Snake for breeding and reintroduction. The two release sites that have met these parameters are the **Conecuh National Forest in Covington County Alabama** and **The Nature Conservancy's Apalachicola Bluffs and Ravines Preserves in Liberty County Florida.**



Scan to download this booklet.



## What YOU can do!

If you see a snake near your home? Don't panic! Most snakes are harmless and all snakes deserve our respect. They play an important role in the ecosystem, control rodent populations, and are actually really cool. However, for some that may fear snakes, finding a snake near your home can be an extremely unwanted experience. It is important to understand these animals, be compassionate and consider their right to live in nature. The best part? We can do so with no one getting hurt. Here are three easy ways that you can make your home safe for you and for snakes.

## Be Snake Aware

When walking, playing, or gardening, be conscious of where you put your hands and feet. Snakes like to curl up in dark, quiet places during the heat of the day. Typically in the early morning and evenings, snakes will become more active. At night, always use a light to avoid stepping on a snake. Teach your children about snake safety. Tell them to never pick up snakes and instruct them to get an adult if they see a snake. Educate yourself about the snakes in your area and learn how to properly identify which species are venomous. Find a reptile identification guide or simply search online for "snakes of {your area}".

### Make Yourself and Your Home Snake Safe

Do you have boards, debris or trash lying around the yard? Clear up! A board on the ground is a perfect hangout spot for a snake.

Keep your yard tidy and the snakes won't stay around your house.

Keep your grass low and control thick vegetation around your home.

Examine your home, see a place a snake could get into? Close up cracks and other openings.

Rodent proof your home, but never use poison or glue traps to do so. Snakes will search for food where there is prey.

Welcome non-venomous snakes to your yard. Snakes are excellent at rodent control!

Snakes are shy and prefer to not be bothered. If you maintain an active presence around your home, you will scare most snakes away.

Learn about snakebite first aid, just in case.

Empower yourself to safely relocate snakes you encounter by taking a snake training course.

I \_\_\_\_\_ pledge to protect snakes.

Snakes are critically important animals for our world, as they maintain balance in the food web and keep ecosystems healthy. Having snakes in your community provides humans an ecological service by controlling pest populations. In taking this pledge you are committing yourself to native snake conservation.

"In the end, we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand and we will understand only what we are taught."

~ Baba Dioum

**SAFE**  
SAVING ANIMALS  
FROM EXTINCTION  
EASTERN INDIGO SNAKE

*Respect the Snake*



Scan to download this booklet and sign the pledge to **Save Snakes!**

Scan to print out your own coloring sheet.



## Animals of the Pinewood Forest Habitat -

*Can you find the Eastern Indigo Snakes and the animals below?*

American alligator

Armadillo

Black bear

Bobcat

Bobwhite quail

Burrowing owl

Diamondback rattlesnake

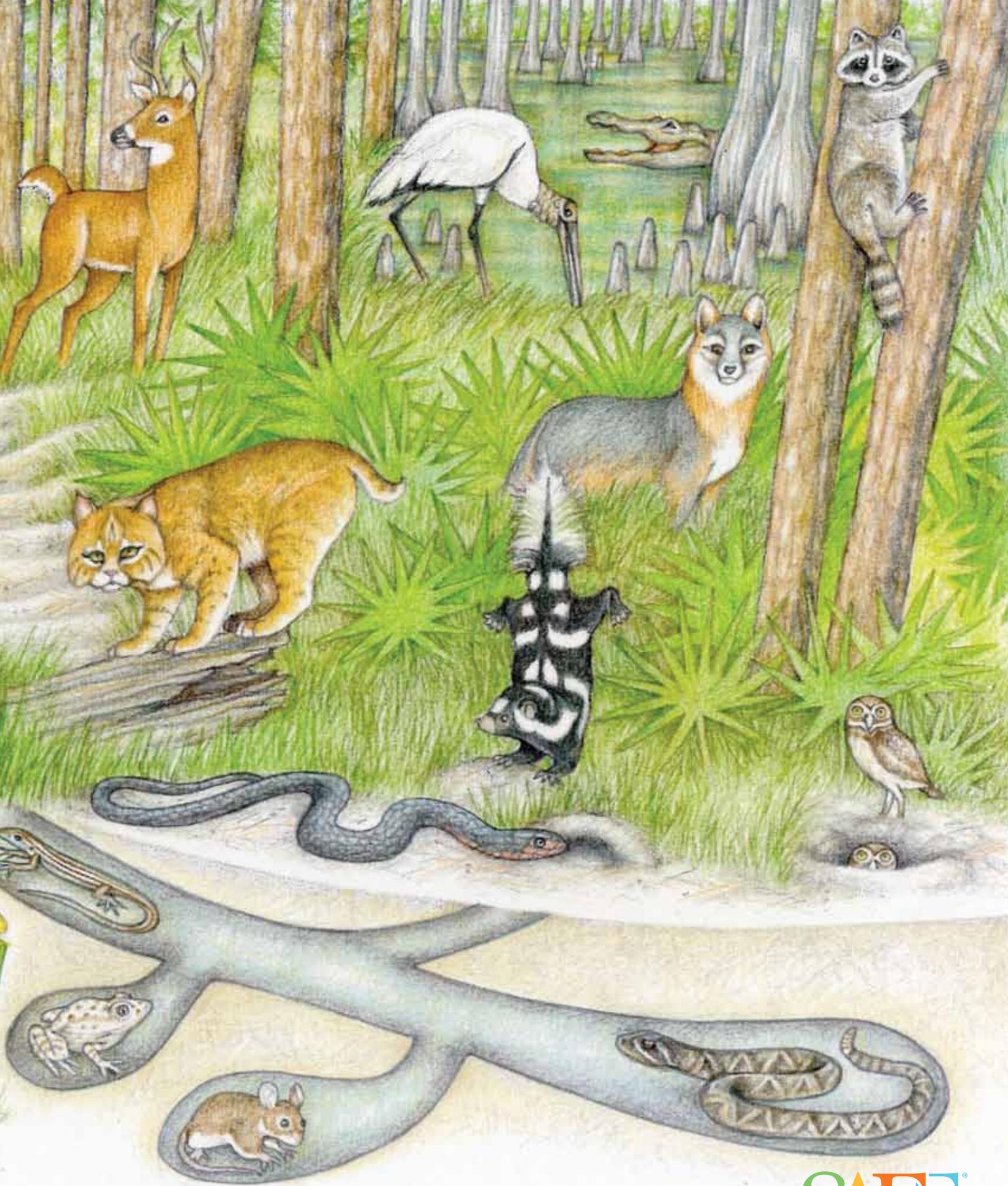
Florida panther

Gopher frog

Gopher mouse

Gopher tortoise

Gray fox



Six-lined race runner  
Opossum  
Raccoon

Red-cockaded woodpecker  
Sandhill crane  
Spotted skunk

Whitetail deer  
Wood stork



# Designing Your Certified Wildlife Backyard

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Plants and animals that live together in a habitat form an interconnected community. Sometimes species behaviors are helpful to other species in the community, creating a mutualistic relationship. An example of this is the digging of burrows by gopher tortoises. Other species (like Eastern Indigo Snakes) use these burrows for shelter.

You may already have wildlife-welcoming trees and plants in your yard, but keep in mind that wherever green grass grows, there was once habitat – a forest, prairie, or wetland. Many wildlife enthusiasts concerned about disappearing wildlife and wilderness are reverting their backyard back to a natural state by replacing grass with flowering plants, shrubs, and trees that provide snakes and other wildlife with food, clean water, shelter, and a place to rear their young. With just a few simple steps, you can turn any backyard into a healthy, sustainable wildlife habitat and a haven for animals and plants. The goal of this lesson is to make your home safe for all members of its community, both scaly and furry!

## OBJECTIVES:

### We will

- Understand that our backyards are vital habitats for local wildlife and learn new ways to support them.
- Discover the four essentials for survival and learn how to implement them into our backyards.
- Promote wildlife diversity in our backyards and community.
- Have fun creating a backyard oasis for native wildlife to enjoy!



Scan to get a full list of what you'll need.

## The “FOUR ESSENTIALS” for getting started:



### Food

Plants that produce native berries, fruits, nectar, or seeds



### Water

Clean, accessible water: birdbaths, streams, or seasonal pans, and rainwater collectors



### Cover (shelter)

Native ground cover, low bushy plants, rock piles, and upcycled pots



### Place to raise young

Dead trees (snags), large bushy plants, nesting boxes

## ACTION STEPS:

Make a plan. Find out the different types of habitats and corresponding species native to your area, and choose what type you would like your backyard to represent. Determine what sorts of items and resources are needed to make the habitat suitable for wildlife.

Once you plan your space, follow these steps to become a **Certified Backyard Habitat** through the **National Wildlife Federation!** Visit [nwf.org/CERTIFY](http://nwf.org/CERTIFY)

**Follow these simple steps as a way to complete your support of being outdoors and conserving a future for wildlife:**

Make a plan and start small. If you remove something, be ready to replace it, but you do not have to do it all at once!

Plant native. Select native trees, shrubs, and flowers that offer food for wildlife like seeds, berries, nuts, and nectar.

Power in numbers. Enlist your neighbors and community to join in and add wildlife-friendly plants in yards, parks, workplaces, and schoolyards. Join a coalition of citizen scientist collecting data about how we can coexist with wildlife.

Eliminate insecticide use. Insects are the primary diet of most wildlife, and a critical source of protein for hatchlings and juveniles.

Provide clean, accessible water. Placing birdbaths and small dishes at ground level is a great start for sources of water. Remember to replace water every 2 or 3 days.

Limit water use. Capture rainwater, use drip or soaker hoses for irrigation, create your space using water-wise landscaping.

Keep tree snags and add habitat shelters. Standing dead trees are called snags and provide cavity nesting for rearing young. Add shelters, like nesting boxes to ensure wildlife visits your backyard.

Keep your cats indoors! Free-roaming, domesticated cats kill billions of native wildlife each year.

Control exotic species through removing non-native plants, reducing open lawn spaces, and install native plants from native nurseries.

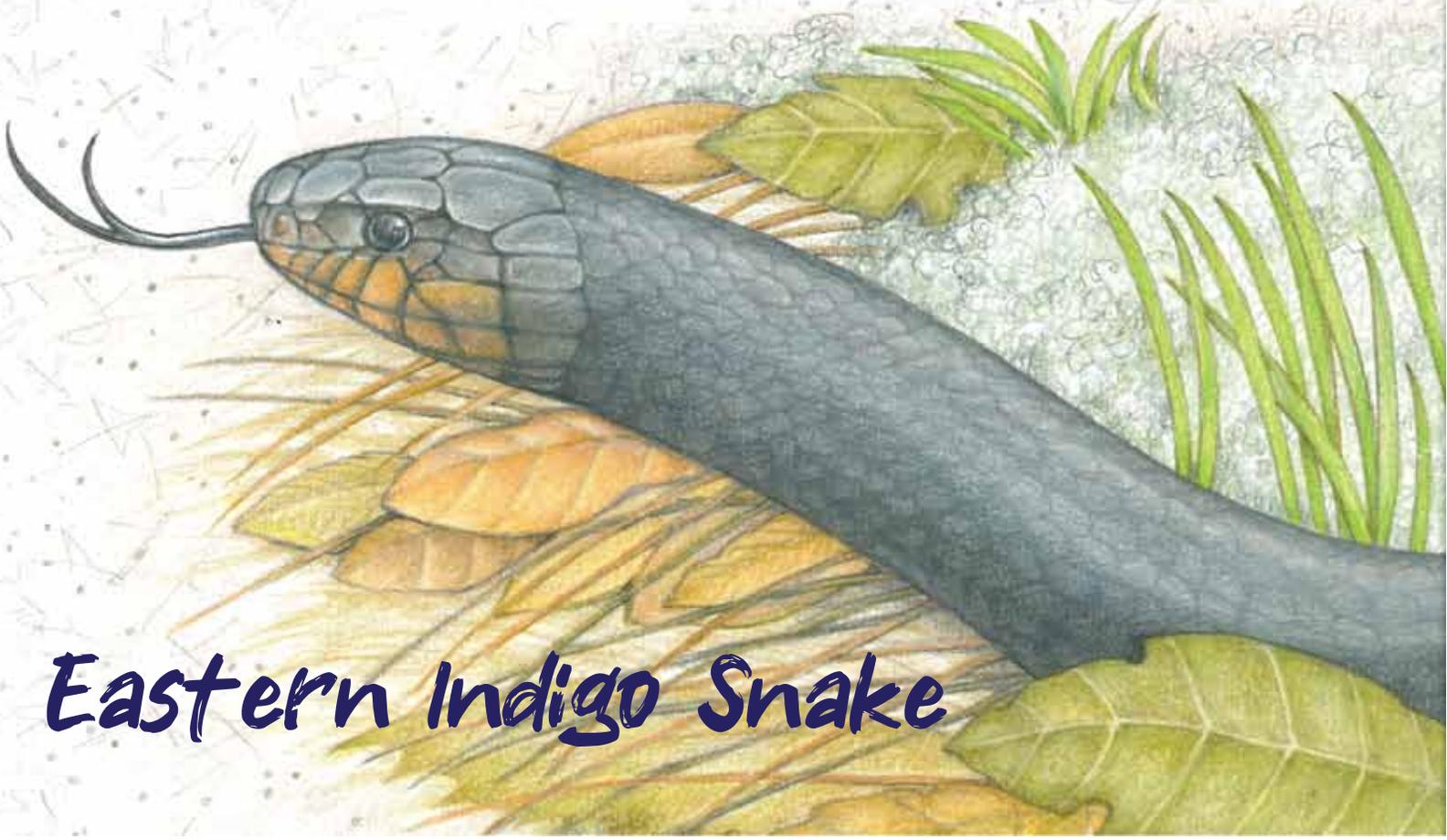
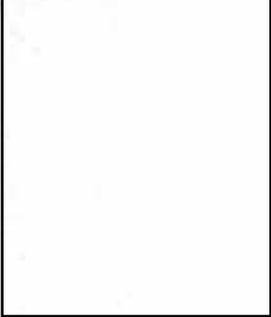
Create your own compost garden.

Register your backyard habitat with the National Wildlife Federation!

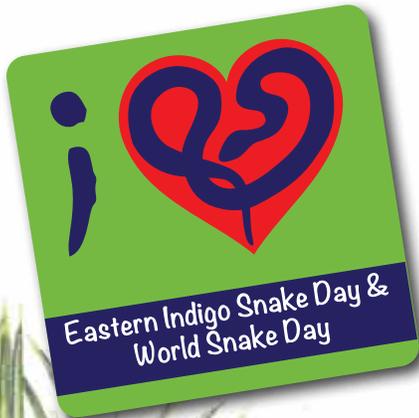


Use this space to design your own **Wildlife Backyard**. Identify existing structures and features (like buildings and trees). Create symbols to represent the Four Essentials (food, water, cover (shelter), place to raise young) and a legend to explain what the symbols mean. Then use the symbols to show where they are in your wildlife backyard.

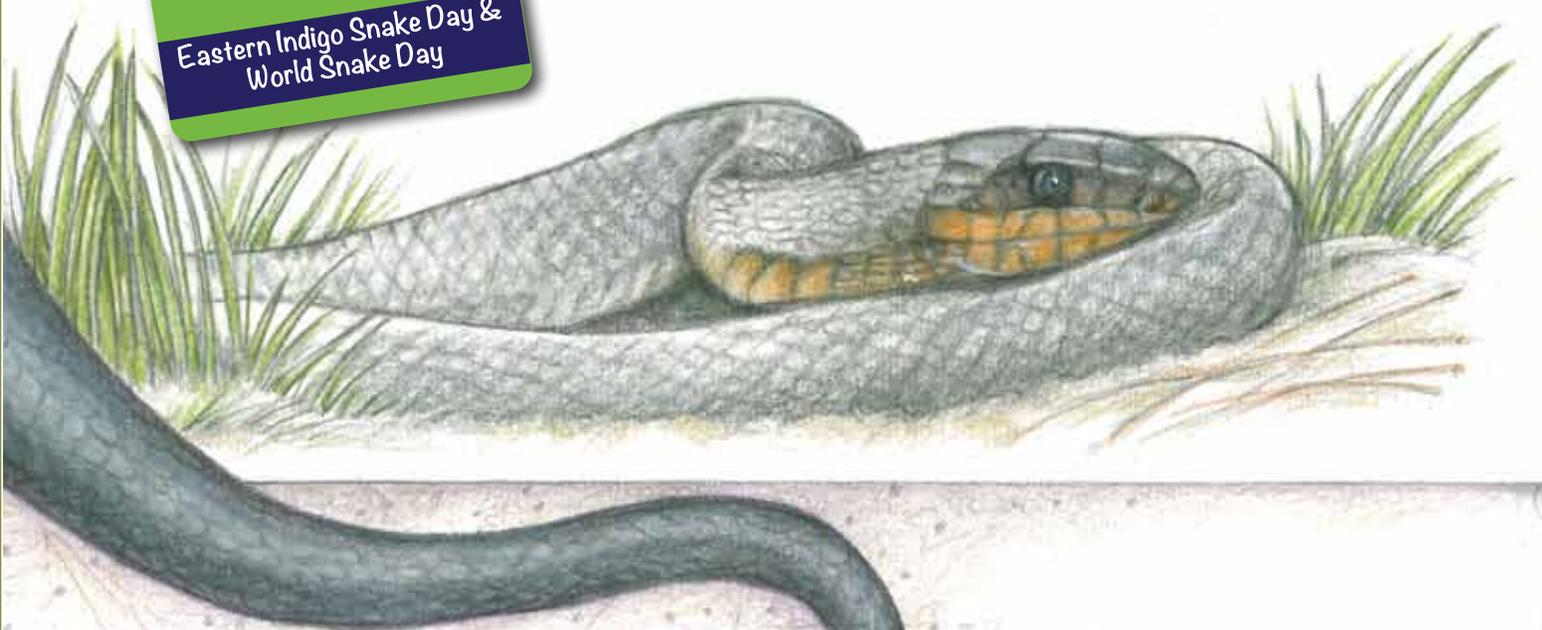
**LEGEND**



*Eastern Indigo Snake*



The *i*  Eastern Indigo Snake Day is a recognized SAFE-related species awareness day occurring every *February 8th*. This ongoing annual outreach educates the general public on the important role this iconic species plays in the longleaf pine ecosystem. We would also invite you to celebrate *World Snake Day on July 16th*.



### Tell us about your visit!

Did you visit a Zoo, Aquarium, or Nature Center today?

Zoo  Aquarium  Nature Center

Where? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you sign the pledge to save snakes?  Yes  No

Will you take steps to make your backyard a safe space for native wildlife?

Yes  No

Has this resource given you a deeper appreciation of backyard conservation?

Yes  No

Do you have a better understanding of snake conservation after learning about the Eastern Indigo Snake?

Yes  No



Scan to download this booklet.

St Augustine Alligator Farm  
999 Anastasia Blvd  
St. Augustine, FL 32080