



New Jersey Pinelands Commission

PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release:

New Jersey Pinelands Commission awarded federal grant to fund study of eastern kingsnakes in the Pinelands

NEW LISBON, N.J. – The Pinelands Commission has been awarded a federal grant that will help fund a scientific study of eastern kingsnakes in the Pinelands.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently approved the Commission's request for \$324,949 toward the four-year study.

"Very little is known about the eastern kingsnake population in the Pinelands, although there have been reports that the species is declining in other areas of the Atlantic Coastal Plain," said Nancy Wittenberg, Executive Director of the Commission. "This study will provide valuable information about the habitat and life cycle of kingsnakes and provide a baseline to allow us to evaluate the overall health of the population in the Pinelands."

The eastern kingsnake is a non-venomous constrictor that eats lizards, bird and turtle eggs, small mammals and other snakes, including timber rattlesnakes. It is listed as a species of special concern in New Jersey because it is vulnerable to multiple threats, is potentially declining, and its distribution and population status are unknown. Threats may include habitat loss from development and agriculture; poaching and collection; and mortality from intentional killing, motorized vehicles and predators.

The kingsnake study will be a collaboration between scientists at the Pinelands Commission, Herpetological Associates and The College of New Jersey. In 2019, in preparation of the study, collaborators captured 17 kingsnakes. Thirteen of the snakes were each implanted with a small radio transmitter.

Scientists use receivers to track snake movements and learn about their activity ranges, as well as their use of uplands and wetland habitats and the timing of shedding, denning and nesting. Scientists also implanted a small, glass-coated microchip in each of the 13 kingsnakes. The microchip allows for the permanent identification of an animal through the use of a special scanner that reads a unique tag number for each snake.

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The Pinelands Commission is contributing \$108,315 toward the study. It is scheduled to be completed in 2023.

ATTENTION REPORTERS/EDITORS: High-resolution digital photos of eastern kingsnakes can be obtained by contacting Paul Leakan of the Pinelands Commission at (609) 894-7300 or at info@pinelands.nj.gov. A video summation of the study has been posted on YouTube and is available for use at <https://youtu.be/9wGXE67Qa08>.



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