

The Snake Community Inhabiting a Levee System in Central Illinois

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Introduction

Several reptile populations are in decline (1) and anthropogenic habitat loss and alteration are arguably the factors having the greatest impact on these species (4). Little is known about how reptile populations respond to habitat alteration, especially in watersheds. This study examines which species are using a levee system constructed in 1981 between a river and a reservoir (Fig. below).

Methods

Surveys for snakes were made several times a week during Spring 2006. We recorded the mass (± 0.5 g), sex, snout-vent length (± 1 mm) and tail length (± 1 mm) of every captured specimen. Snakes were individually marked using scale clipping and released at the site of capture.

Results

Abundance	Species
38	<i>Nerodia sipedon</i>
8	<i>Lampropeltis calligaster</i>
3	<i>Coluber constrictor foxii</i>
1	<i>Opheodrys aestivus</i>
1	<i>Storeria dekayi wrightorum</i>
1	<i>Diadophis punctatus edwardsii</i>



Nerodia sipedon



Lampropeltis calligaster



Coluber constrictor foxii



Opheodrys aestivus



Storeria dekayi wrightorum



Diadophis punctatus edwardsii

Discussion

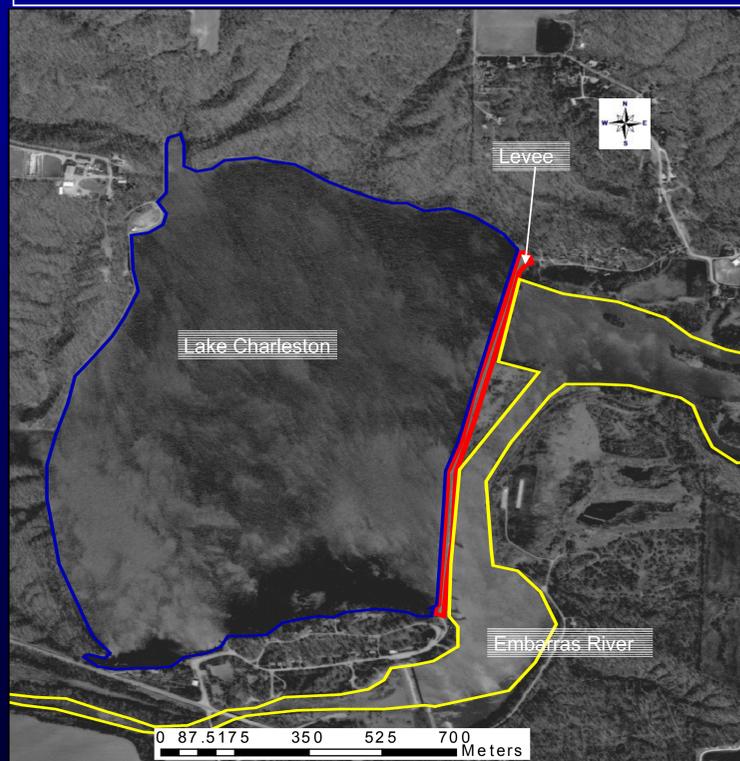
Six species of snakes were found on the levee. Of these species, *N. sipedon* was the most abundant. The levee provides important habitat for several species (including taxa that would typically be depredating each other). Species richness was higher in the spring; therefore, we suggest that snakes are using the levee as an overwintering site and then moving off to the surrounding habitat for the activity season. Hibernacula site selection is important for the survival of many snake populations (3). The identification and protection of critical habitat is needed for the conservation of many snake species (2).

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References

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