

LAKE ERIE WATER SNAKES

• Make Your Boating Experience More Pleasant •

The Lake Erie water snake is frequently encountered by boaters in the Lake Erie island area. Lake Erie water snakes (LEWS) come in a variety of colors, ranging from banded gray and brown blotches to solid gray. If you are in the vicinity of the Lake Erie islands and see a snake in the water, it is probably a LEWS. Because the LEWS is always found close to the water during the summer, recreational boaters and fisherman frequently come into contact with these snakes. The snake may venture onto swim platforms of various watercraft while docked or at anchor. If you have a LEWS on your boat, don't panic! LEWS are non-venomous. However, they are aggressive when handled.

LEWS Facts:

- Lake Erie water snakes are active primarily from early May to October and typically enter hibernation between mid-September and mid-October.
- When not hibernating, the snakes spend most of their time near the lake's edge basking on the rocky shoreline (within 45 feet of the water's edge) or foraging just offshore.
- The snake's diet is composed mainly of non-game fish and amphibians. Recent studies have shown that the snakes are eating mostly the aquatic nuisance species, the round goby.
- LEWS mate from late May to early June by forming "mating balls" consisting of one female and several males. Live birth of 30 or so pencil-sized young occurs in early September. Only about 15% of the young survive their first year.
- The Lake Erie water snake has one of the smallest geographic ranges of any vertebrate in the world and is only found on the islands of Lake Erie.
- The snake has benefited from the construction of docks and shoreline protection done in a snake-friendly manner. The LEWS has demonstrated an ability to coexist with humans, a condition necessary for the snake to persist on the islands.



To discourage LEWS from getting into your boat:

DO:

- **Keep the boat covered when not in use** for extended periods (more than a few days). Although this is not a total remedy, some covers hinder the snakes' ability to crawl inside the boat.
- **Tie the boat a few feet away from the dock.** If you keep the boat snug against the dock, it increases the likelihood that snakes may fall inside.
- **Empty the boat's live well and pull in any stringers of fish.** Keeping baitfish in the live well for extended periods and leaving fish on stringers may attract snakes.
- **Place Snake-A-Way®, or other products that contain the active ingredient Naphthalene** (an active ingredient in mothballs) near the areas where you believe snakes are accessing the boat; it may deter them.
- **Remove the snake carefully by hand.** Use a towel or rag to cover its head to protect yourself from bites. Although LEWS are non-venomous, they are very aggressive when picked up. Use BOTH hands to pick the snake up. One hand should be just behind the head, and the other should support the body. Since you are in the boat, the quickest and easiest solution is to drop the snake in the water.

DON'T:

- **DON'T TRY TO USE A FISHING NET!!!** The snake may be small enough to fit through the holes of the net and fall back in the boat as you try to put them overboard. If the snake is too large for the holes in the net, it will attempt to escape and get itself stuck; then your only option is to work the snake out by hand, which may require cutting the net.
- **DON'T KILL OR HARM** them intentionally to remove them from your watercraft. The Lake Erie water snake is protected by both state and federal laws. Intentionally harming these snakes is **ILLEGAL!**