**Reptilia:** Squamata: Serpentes: Colubridae

**Thamnophis proximus** (Say)

**Western ribbon Snake**

*Coluber proximus* Say, 1823:339. Type-locality, “Stone quarry on west side of Missouri River, 3 miles above the mouth of Bayers River.” Restated as “approximately 3 miles ENE Fort Calhoun, Washington County, Nebraska” by Rossman (1963:109). According to Smith and Taylor (1945:166), the holotype is lost. It probably was deposited in the Acad. Nat. Sci. Philadelphia, although this is not a certainty (H. M. Smith, personal communication).

*Tropidonatus proximus*: Boie, 1827:535.


*Eutainia proxima*: Baird and Girard, 1853:25.

*Eutaenia proxima*: Baird, 1859:16.

*Eutaenia jareci*: Cooper, 1860:299.


*Thamnophis proxima*: S. Garman, 1892:105.


- **Content.** Six subspecies are recognized: proximus, orarius, rubrilineatus, diabolicus, rutiloris, and alpinus.

- **Definition.** A large, long-tailed member of the genus *Thamnophis* characterized by: 19–19–17 dorsal scale rows; a single precocular; typically 8 supralabials, the 4th and 5th entering the orbit; 141 to 181 ventrals; 82 to 131 subcaudals; lateral stripe on dorsal scale rows 3 and 4, at least anteriorly; labials and ventrals without black markings; dark ventrolateral stripe absent or narrow in most populations; parietal spots fused, brightly colored, and usually large; hemipenis short, usually extending to the seventh or eighth subcaudal when inverted; teeth numerous, averaging about 30 to each maxilla, 34 to each dentary, 20 to each palatine, and 33 to each pterygoid.

- **Descriptions.** Rossman (1963) provided detailed descriptions of external morphology, color pattern, proportions, dentition, and hemipenes, including the individual, geographic, sexual, and ontogenetic variation of each, where applicable. He also furnished descriptions of all six subspecies.

- **Illustrations.** Drawings of the head appear in Schmidt and Davis (1941) and Rossman (1963). Colored illustrations of *T. p. rubrilineatus* (Conant, 1958) and *T. p. diabolicus* (Stebbins, 1966) have been published, as well as photographs of *T. p. rubrilineatus* (Gloyd, 1935), *T. p. diabolicus* (Wright and Wright, 1957), and *T. p. proximus* (Smith, 1961; Anderson, 1965).

- **Distribution.** From southern Wisconsin, Indiana, and the Mississippi Valley westward through the Great Plains to southeastern Colorado and eastern New Mexico, and southward through eastern Mexico to central Costa Rica. It occurs on the Pacific coast of Mexico from the vicinity of Acapulco, Guerrero, to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Oaxaca (Liner and Dundee, 1969).

- **Fossil Record.** Holman has reported this species from the Pleistocene of Forod Co., Texas (1962), Denton Co., Texas (1963), Llano Co., Texas (1966), Lubbock Co., Texas (1969), and St. Louis, Missouri (1965). There also are Pleistocene records from Kendall Co., Texas (Hill, 1966), and Meade Co., Kansas (Brattstrom, 1967). The latter is cited as *Thamnophis* sp., near sauritus, but geographic considerations suggest proximus. Holman’s use of sauritus in his earlier papers (1962, 1963) reflected the nomenclature then current. “Rossman (1962) demonstrated that proximus is a valid species, rather than a geographic race of *T. sauritus*.

- **Etymology.** The specific name proximus is Latin, meaning nearest or next. The subspecific names are derived as follows: orarius, from the Latin orarius, of the coast; rubrilineatus, from the Latin ruber, red, and the Latin lineatus, marked with lines; diabolicus, from the Greek diabolikos, devilish, an allusion to the forked pattern of the parietal spots and to the aridity of the region inhabited by it.

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**Map.** The solid circles mark type localities; open circles indicate other records. Stars indicate fossil records. Areas of intergradation are shaded.
this race; *rutiloris* from the Latin *rutile*, to be red, and the Latin oris, of the mouth; *alpinus*, from the Latin *alpīnus*, of the Alps.

1. *Thamnophis proximus proximus* (Say)

**Coluber proximus** Say. See species account.

*Eutaenia Faireyi* Baird & Girard. See species account.

*Tropidonotus saurita* var. *Faireyi*: Dumeril, Bihorn & Duméril, 1854:585. [by implication]

*Tropidonotus saurita* var. *proxima*: Jan, 1863:70.


*Thamnophis sauritus proximus*: Ruthven, 1908:98.

*Thamnophis proximum proximus*: Horier, 1911:159.

*Thamnophis saurita* var. *proxima*: Klauber, 1948:9. (See Remarks in *T. saurita* account)


- **Definition.** A subspecies of *Thamnophis proximus* characterized by a black dorsum, a narrow orange vertebral stripe, and a lack of a dark ventrolateral stripe.

2. *Thamnophis proximus orarius* Rossman


- **Definition.** A subspecies of *Thamnophis proximus* characterized by an olive-brown dorsum, a bright red vertebral stripe, and a narrow dark ventrolateral stripe or none at all.

3. *Thamnophis proximus rubrilineatus* Roseman

*Thamnophis proximus rubrilineatus* Roseman, 1963:134. Type-locality, “State Fish Hatchery, 8.2 miles NW Ingram, Kerr County, Texas.” Holotype, Univ. Florida #12188, adult male collected by M. J. Fouquette, Jr., and D. A. Rossman on 26 June 1960.

- **Definition.** A subspecies of *Thamnophis proximus* characterized by an olive-brown to olive-gray dorsum, a broad gold vertebral stripe, and a narrow dark ventrolateral stripe or none at all.

4. *Thamnophis proximus diabolicus* Rossman


- **Definition.** A subspecies of *Thamnophis proximus* characterized by an olive-gray to olive-brown dorsum, a bright red vertebral stripe, and a narrow dark ventrolateral stripe or none at all.

5. *Thamnophis proximus rutiloris* (Cope)

*Eutaenia rutiloris* Cope. See species account.

*Thamnophis sauritus rutiloris*: Smith, 1839:5.

*Thamnophis sauritus chalcena*: Dunn, 1940:192.

*Thamnophis sirtalis chalcena*: Klauber, 1948:9. (See Remarks in *T. saurita* account)


- **Definition.** A subspecies of *Thamnophis proximus* characterized by an olive-brown dorsum, a broad grayish-tan vertebral stripe, yellow-orange labials, a narrow lateral stripe, and a moderately narrow ventrolateral stripe.

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6. *Thamnophis proximus alpinus* Rossman


- **Definition.** A subspecies of *Thamnophis proximus* characterized by a dark brown dorsum, a gold vertebral stripe, yellow-orange labials, a narrow lateral stripe, chevron-shaped parietal spots, a broad ventrolateral stripe, and a relatively short tail.

**Comment**

The zones of intergradation between the various subspecies require precise definition. Fresh specimens from the lower Rio Grande valley suggest that the South Texas—Tamaulipas population is more closely related to *T. p. diabolicus* than to *T. p. orarius*. The ecological relationships of *T. proximus* and *T. saurita* where their ranges are contiguous or overlap warrant careful investigation.

**Literature Cited**


Cooper, J. G. 1860. Reports of explorations and surveys to ascertain the most practicable and economical route for a railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean. U. S. Senate Rept. 12(4):292-306.


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