

# Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife wants to educate residents about declining black racer snake population

In search of the black racer snake: Little is known about the abundance and distribution of northern black racers in Massachusetts. An upcoming Massachusetts Wildlife magazine article follows a group on Martha's Vineyard as they research these snakes.

Seeing a five-foot long northern black racer (*Coluber constrictor*) hunting in a meadow or climbing a shrub can be a memorable wildlife encounter where responses range from wonder to heart-stopping fear. Sadly, encounters with black racers are declining in New England. As with many other species, black racers are at risk from habitat loss and fragmentation, and anecdotal information indicates the species is declining in our region. The Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan ranks the black racer as common across the state, but it is of concern because little is known about their current abundance and distribution.

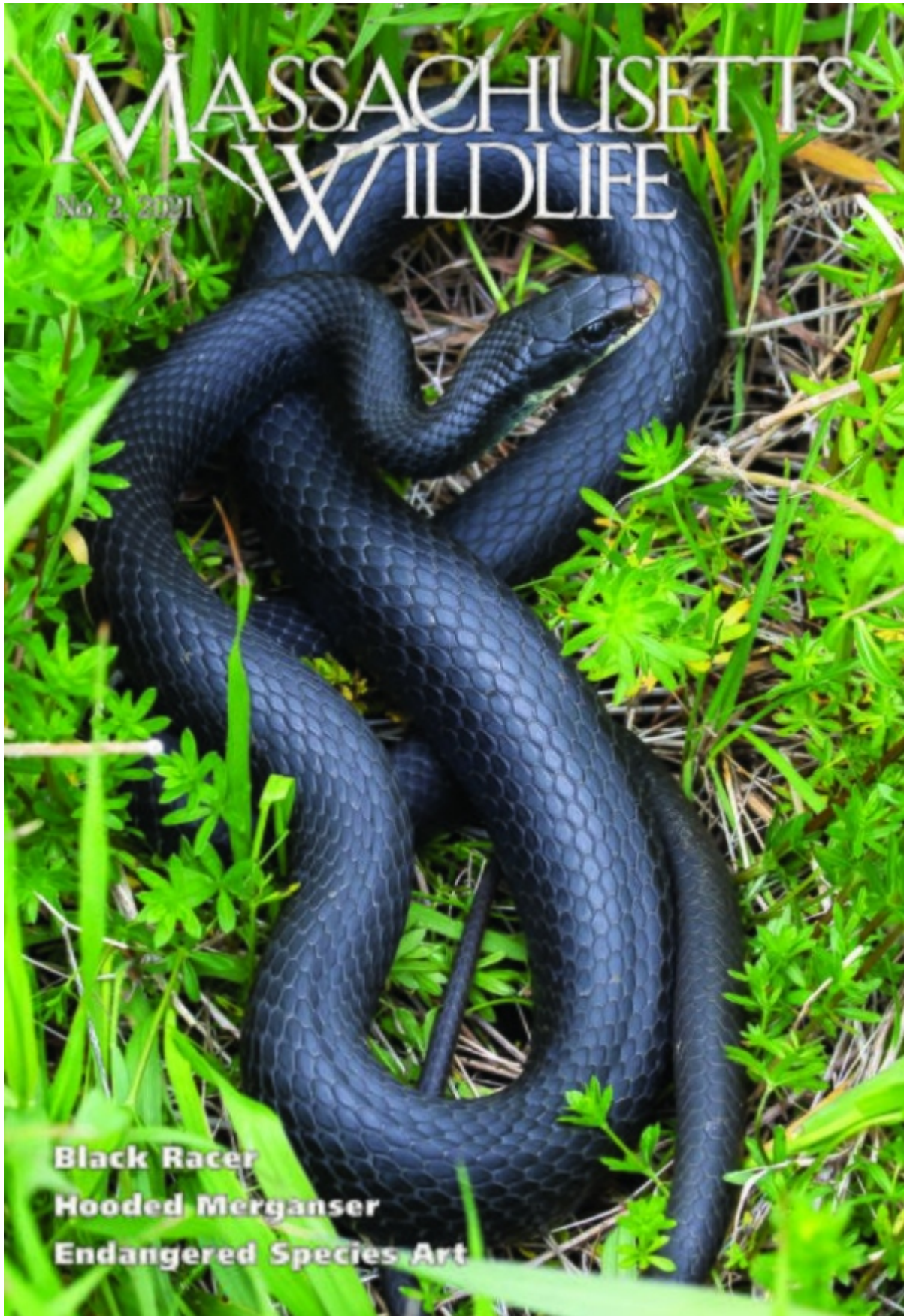
With these threats in mind, and lack of baseline data on the species, BiodiversityWorks (BW), a non-profit headquartered on Martha's Vineyard focused on wildlife conservation through research and monitoring, embarked on a five-year study to document racer distribution on the island, their movements, and habitat use across different landscapes.

Four racers were captured using funnel traps—and named Audrey, Katama, Scooter, and Liatris—and each was implanted with a

radio transmitter by a volunteer veterinarian. BW tracked the movements of each racer for almost a year as they moved around the island. The group documented home range, nesting and hibernation sites, and the vegetation communities the racers occupied. At the conclusion of the study, the snakes were recaptured, had their transmitters removed and were released, and in one case, with tragic results.

The complete story of the study, along with more black racer facts, can be found in the No. 2, 2021 issue of Massachusetts Wildlife magazine. Other topics include hooded mergansers, an endangered species art exhibit, and advice on becoming a hunter on a budget. To subscribe, visit [mass.gov/dfw/magazine](https://mass.gov/dfw/magazine).

If you see a northern black racer, MassWildlife encourages you to report your sighting using Heritage Hub, [mass.gov/heritagehub](https://mass.gov/heritagehub). Obtaining population data from citizen scientists like you is a critical component of conservation.



*MassWildlife Magazine photo.*