

Observing Rattlesnakes and Avoiding Conflict

- Observing rattlesnakes at a safe distance is the best way to avoid being bitten.
- Learn how to tell the difference between non-venomous and venomous snakes.
- Never try to poke or handle a venomous snake. Teach children to leave snakes alone.
- Be alert when living in snake country. Snakes hide well.
- Stay on paths and cleared areas. If you must travel in brush or tall grass, use a stick to sweep the area as you walk.
- Do not gather firewood at night when snakes are more active. Be careful reaching into woodpiles, stacked building materials or brush piles.
- When camping, use a floored tent with a zipper door. Don't walk around the campsite in the dark without a flashlight. Keep shoes and clothing inside the tent.
- Look carefully before sitting down on the ground or on rocks and logs.
- Wear boots or other closed-toe shoes while hiking.
- If you encounter a venomous snake away from human developments, leave it alone. It is in its natural environment.
- Purchase a snake bite kit to take with you when hiking or camping. These kits can be purchased from most outdoor gear companies.

If You Encounter a Rattlesnake or are bitten:

Deaths from snake bites are very rare. However, the injuries require proper treatment.

- If you hear a rattle, don't move away until you know where the sound is coming from. Back away slowly and make sure you have a clear space to exit and not trip or fall.
- If bitten, seek medical attention immediately.
- Treat for shock and temperature extremes.
- Remove tight clothing or jewelry from the bite area.
- Get a description of the snake if possible.
- **Remember: Do not** try to cut and suck the venom from the wound. Do not apply cold packs to the wound. Never use a tourniquet.
- If pets are bitten, seek veterinary treatment immediately.

Contact Numbers

Some species of rattlesnakes are protected in parts of their range. To find out what kind of rattlesnakes are in your area, or to report a problem with rattlesnakes, call:

1-866-4USDAWS Toll free-State and Nationwide

Poaching Hotline: **1-800-622-DEER**

Call is toll free and can be confidential.

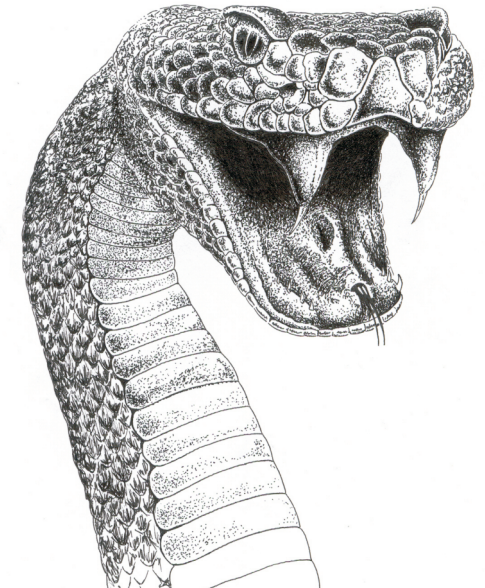
For more information on rattlesnakes call:
Utah's Hogle Zoo at **801-582-1631** or visit our web site at www.hoglezoo.org



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Living With Predators



Rattlesnakes

Can You Identify A Rattlesnake?

There are two general types of snakes: non-venomous and venomous. Some venomous snakes in the U.S. are called pit vipers.

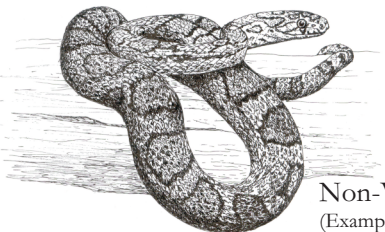
Pit vipers, such as the rattlesnakes, inject venom into their prey's body through two hollow, front fangs in their upper jaw. When not in use, the fangs fold back along the inside of the mouth. The snakes' venom disables their prey.

Characteristics that distinguish a pit viper from non-venomous snakes are:

- Heat sensory pits that appear as tiny holes on each side of the snake's head. They use these sense organs and their tongue to locate warm-blooded prey.
- Not-round (elliptical) and vertically positioned eye pupils.
- A broad, triangle-shaped head.
- A single row of scales on the underside of the tail area after the vent.



Pit Viper
(Example: Western Diamondback)



Non-Venomous Snake
(Example: Gopher Snake)

Rattlesnakes In The United States

Range/Habitat: Of more than 200 different species of snakes found in the U.S., 19 species are venomous. Rattlesnakes, water moccasins (cotton mouths), copperheads and coral snakes are some of the venomous snakes one may encounter in North America.

Depending on the species, rattlesnakes can be found in all types of habitats, from grasslands, lakes and rivers, to deserts or forests.

Rattlesnakes in Eastern U.S.:

Eastern diamondback, timber, massasauga and pygmy.

Rattlesnakes in the Western U.S.:

Western diamondback, sidewinder, rock, speckled, black-tailed, twin-spotted, red diamond, mojave, tiger, western (Great Basin, prairie), ridge-nosed and massasauga.

Characteristics: Snakes are cold-blooded and are very sensitive to external temperatures. During cold weather they hibernate in rock crevices or burrows underground. During warm weather most rattlesnakes become active at dawn and dusk. They can be seen during the daytime, basking in the sunlight to help regulate their body temperature.

Like most snakes, rattlesnakes shed their skin as they grow, about three to five times a year. After each shed a new segment is added to their rattle. Rattlesnakes are ovoviviparous, which means females retain their eggs in their bodies and give birth to live young. The young snakes leave their mothers a few hours after birth.

Diet: Rattlesnakes prefer to prey on warm-blooded animals, mainly rodents like rats and mice. They will also eat birds, insects, eggs, amphibians and other reptiles. Adult snakes usually only need to feed once a week or less.

Snakes eat their prey whole. Their skin is very stretchable and they have jaws that are loosely connected, allowing them to open wide to eat animals larger than their head.

Rattlesnakes' Enemies and their Defenses:

Rattlesnakes are eaten by other snakes, birds and mammals. Humans hunt snakes for their skins and meat or kill them out of fear.

Rattlesnakes are seldom aggressive, but will defend themselves. Once threatened, they will coil, begin shaking their rattle and hiss. This is a warning to to leave.

Their strike is directed by heat and sensory organs in the tongue and head. Rattlesnakes can quickly strike in any direction from any position. Striking in defense is their last resort.

Who's Fooling You?

There are some species of non-venomous snakes that mimic rattlesnake behavior to protect themselves from predators.

One such species is the **bull snake**, also called a **gopher snake** (*Pituophis melanoleucus*). They are found in southwestern Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. Bull snakes are yellowish cream colored with blotches on their back that can be black, or brown.

When threatened, bull snakes will hiss and shake their tails like rattlesnakes do. This is meant to fool the predator into thinking they are venomous snakes. Bull snakes are often mistaken for rattlesnakes and killed by humans out of fear.

Why Are Snakes Important?

Snakes are very important in controlling the population of rodents and insects. Having snakes around can be helpful for farmers, since rodents and insects can decimate crops and stored food supplies. Rodent-borne diseases adversely affect more people a year than those bitten by snakes.