



ARKANSAS

Snake Guide



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Keeping the Natural State natural.

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Arkansas Snake Guide

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Arkansas Snake Guide

SPECIES FOUND IN THE NATURAL STATE

Snakes are among the least understood, yet one of the most intriguing groups of animals. Since snakes lack fur, feathers or legs, and aren't warm-blooded, most people find it difficult to relate to them. So, snakes have been feared and maligned for millennia.

Among some cultures, snakes represent evil, yet in others they are respected as much as other animals.



Snakes have adapted to survive in a variety of habitats on all continents – except Antarctica – and in the oceans. Of the 2,900 species found worldwide, 140 species live in the United States. Arkansas is home to 36 species of snakes, six of which are venomous.



Most species of Arkansas snakes are found statewide or almost statewide in their distribution. However, a few are restricted to specific regions such as the Ozark Highlands or Ouachita Mountains.

How to use this guide

This booklet is intended to help Arkansans identify venomous and nonvenomous snakes in The Natural State. Each species account includes a color photograph, common and scientific names, a range map, and descriptions of color, pattern, size, habitats, habits, activity periods, reproduction, foods and unique behaviors.

Sections about snakebite prevention and treatment, and facts about snakes are included to help answer common questions.

On the opposite page is a list of Arkansas herpetologists (people who study amphibians and reptiles) who can provide assistance in your neck of the woods.

Suggested reading

The Amphibians and Reptiles of Arkansas. S.E. Trauth, H.W. Robison and M.V. Plummer. University of Arkansas Press, 2004.

A Field Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of Eastern and Central North America. Third edition expanded Peterson Field Guide Series. R. Conant and J.T. Collins. Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998.

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SUZANNE COLLINS

Copperhead

Agkistrodon contortrix

Range Statewide.

Description Pit viper; keeled scales. Gray, tan or light brown, with 7-20 dark brown, light-edged, hourglass-shaped crossbands. Head can be gray, brown or reddish. Belly is cream-colored with dark gray, brown or black blotches. Young resemble adults, except tail tip is bright yellow or greenish yellow. Adults 24-36 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Occurs in mixed pine-hardwood forests, bottomland hardwood forests, and rocky or brushy fields and hillsides. Active April-November; prowls at night during hot weather. Two to 14 young born August-September. Primarily eats rodents. Also eats frogs, lizards, small snakes and cicadas. Young copperheads and cottonmouths use yellow tail tip as a lure to attract prey.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Cottonmouth

Agkistrodon piscivorus

Range Statewide; uncommon in upland streams of Ozark Highlands and Ouachita mountains.

Description Pit viper; keeled scales. Heavy-bodied, dark olive-brown to black. Indistinct dark crossbands, except when animal is wet. White upper lip, black stripe from snout onto neck. Belly mottled with black-, brown- and cream-colored blotches. Young are brightly banded like copperhead, turning darker with age; tail tip yellow or greenish yellow. Adults average 24-36 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Occurs in variety of wetland habitats: swamps, oxbow lakes, sloughs, drainage ditches and streams. Active April-November; active at night in hot weather. Two to 15 young born August-September. Eats fish, amphibians, lizards, snakes, birds and rodents. Opens mouth – exposing white lining – when threatened.



KELLY IRWIN

Western Diamondback Rattlesnake

Crotalus atrox

Range Uplands of Ouachita Mountains and southwestern Ozark highlands.

Description Pit viper; keeled scales. Light brown, gray to grayish brown, with 24-45 diamond-shaped, light-bordered, brownish blotches. Tail white, with 3-7 black bands; origin of the name “coon-tail rattler.” Pair of pale stripes on the sides of the head. Young are patterned like adults. Adults average 36-60 inches in length; rare individuals up to 72+ inches.

Habitat and Habits Found in upland rocky, open pine-hardwood forests and rocky outcrops. Active April-October; active at night during summer months. Breeds in fall or early spring. Up to 25 young born August-October. Eats large numbers of rats and mice. Also feeds on rabbits and squirrels. Arkansas' rarest venomous snake.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Timber Rattlesnake

Crotalus horridus

Range Statewide.

Description Pit viper; keeled scales. Head and body can be gray, yellow, grayish or yellowish brown, with 15-34 V-shaped black bands on the body; rusty or reddish stripe down center of back. Tail jet black; origin of the name “velvet-tail rattler.” Young are patterned like adults. Adults average 36-60 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Occurs in hardwood, mixed pine-hardwood, bottomland hardwood forests and rocky or brushy fields and hillsides. Active April-October; prowls at night during hot weather. Breeds in fall or early spring, and 3-16 young are born August-October. Eats shrews, gophers, rodents, rabbits, chipmunks, squirrels and birds. Researchers have observed radio-tagged medium-sized adults in trees, presumably in search of prey.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Western Pigmy Rattlesnake

Sistrurus miliaris

Range Statewide; lacking records for most of the Mississippi Delta.

Description Pit viper; keeled scales. Brownish or bluish gray, 20-30 black blotches on the back; black blotches along sides. Orange or yellowish brown stripe down center of back. Black stripe from eye to corner of mouth. Belly dusky cream-colored with black or brown blotches. Young are patterned like adults. Adults 15-20 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Prefers open brushy lowlands, open hardwood and mixed pine-hardwood forests. Active April-October; active at night during summer. Breeds in fall; 4-10 young are born July-September. Feeds on lizards, rodents, frogs and small snakes. Rattle sounds like the buzz of an insect and can be heard only at very close distances.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Texas Coral Snake

Micrurus tener

Range Southern Arkansas, west of the Ouachita River and south of the Little Missouri River.

Description Smooth scales. Head and body banded in brilliant red, yellow and black; bands completely encircle body. Young are patterned like adults. Adults average 20-30 inches in length. Remember the saying, "Red touch black, venom lack; red touch yellow, kill a fellow."

Habitat and Habits Prefers moist pine, hardwood or mixed pine-hardwood forests with loose, sandy soils and pine straw, leaf litter and logs for cover. Active late February through mid-November. Active in early morning or at dusk when humidity is high. Also active at night after rains during summer months. Lays 2-12 eggs in spring, hatching in August-September. Feeds on lizards and small snakes.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Scarlet Snake

Cemophora coccinea

Range Statewide.

Description Harmless. Smooth scales. Orange or red incomplete bands, bordered with black, on a white or yellowish cream base. Belly white or yellowish cream, without markings; snout is pointed. Young are patterned like adults. Adults 14-20 inches in length. Remember the saying, "Red touch black, venom lack."

Habitat and Habits Pine, hardwood or mixed pine-hardwood forests, with loose or sandy soils. Active March-October; active at night or after rains during hot weather. Breeds in spring, lays 3-8 eggs in June. Eggs hatch in August or September. A constrictor; feeding primarily on lizards, small snakes and reptile eggs. Uses pointed snout to burrow in loose soils.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Milk Snake

Lampropeltis triangulum

Range Statewide.

Description Harmless. Smooth scales. Wide orange or red bands, bordered with black, separated by white, or grayish or yellowish white bands. Head can be either red or black. Belly marked with black and white checkerboard, or red, white and black bands extend onto belly. Young are patterned like adults. Adults average 16-28 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Pine, hardwood, mixed pine-hardwood and bottomland forests, especially around rocky areas and under logs. Active March-October. Breeds in spring; lays 2-12 eggs in June. Eggs hatch in August or September. A member of the "kingsnake" group; feeds primarily on lizards, snakes and rodents.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Mississippi Green Water Snake

Nerodia cyclopion

Range Mississippi Delta and Coastal Plain.

Description Keeled scales. Body is drab olive-green or olive-brown, with an indistinct pattern of narrow black crossbars across back, alternating with similar black bars along the sides. Belly is dark brown or dark gray patterned with yellowish or yellowish cream half-moons. Young resemble adults. Adults 30-45 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Inhabits still or very slow-moving waters, such as lakes, ponds, oxbows, ditches and swamps. Active March through November. Most aquatic of our water snakes, seldom found far from water. Breeds April-May and 8-34 young are born August-September. Feeds almost exclusively on small fish, but also eats frogs and salamanders.

JUVENILE



SUZANNE COLLINS

Plainbelly Water Snake

Nerodia erythrogaster

Range Almost statewide; apparently absent from north-central Ozarks.

Description Keeled scales. An olive-gray, dark greenish gray, or brownish black body, sometimes with indistinct crossbars on the back. The belly is uniformly yellow, yellowish cream, or light orangish yellow. Young are strongly patterned with large, dark blackish-brown blotches on the back and sides; this pattern fades with age. Adults 30-48 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits This water snake can be found in sluggish water habitats of swamps, oxbow lakes, sloughs, rivers and streams. Active March-November. Like many other snakes, it's active at night during hot weather. Breeds in spring and gives live birth in late summer to 10-30 young. Eats fish, amphibians and crayfish.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Broad-banded Water Snake

Nerodia fasciata

Range Mississippi Delta and Coastal Plain; also found in areas of eastern Ozark and Ouachita mountains.

Description Keeled scales. Body has 11-17 broad, irregularly shaped dark brown, reddish brown or black crossbands, separated by yellow, orange or yellowish gray. Belly is yellow or cream-colored with large dark brown or reddish-brown blotches. Young are patterned like adults, but more brightly colored. Adults average 22-36 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits A lowland water snake of swamps, oxbow lakes, sloughs, ponds and sluggish streams. Active late March-October. Breeds April-May and gives birth to 7-40 young in July-August. It feeds on fish, frogs and tadpoles. Like other water snakes, it basks on brush or driftwood piles in or near water.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Diamondback Water Snake

Nerodia rhombifer

Range Coastal Plain, Mississippi Delta and the valleys of the Arkansas and White rivers.

Description Keeled scales. Head and body can be light brown, yellowish or olive. A series of black crossbars with light edges forms a chain-like pattern on the back. The belly is cream or yellowish with scattered black or brown crescent-shaped spots. Young are patterned like adults. Adults average 30-48 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Found in a variety of wetland habitats: swamps, sloughs, marshes, oxbow lakes, rivers and streams. Active March-October; active at night during hot weather. Breeds April-May; 13-62 young are born August-October. Eats fish and amphibians. Like other water snakes, when threatened it will flatten the head, bite viciously and discharge a foul-smelling musk from the vent.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Northern Water Snake

Nerodia sipedon

Range Statewide, but uncommon in the Delta.

Description Keeled scales. Light brown or gray with dark brown or reddish-brown bands on fore-body and alternating rows of brown and gray blotches on back and sides of hind-body. Light belly with dark brown, orange, yellow, red and gray half-moons. Young are brightly colored; patterned like adults. Adults 24-42 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Most commonly seen water snake in reservoirs and fast-flowing streams and rivers. Active March-October; active at night during summer. Mating occurs in spring and 6-30 young are born July-September. Feeds on fish and frogs. As with the other water snakes, this snake is often misidentified as the venomous cottonmouth or copperhead and is needlessly killed by uninformed individuals.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Racer

Coluber constrictor

Range Statewide.

Description Smooth scales. A snake of variable color pattern, depending on location. Central Arkansas: body and belly are black; throat and chin white. Mississippi Delta: body slate gray, belly gray-blue, black mask-like stripe on side of head. Coastal Plain: body black, bluish or olive, speckled with white, yellow, cream or pale blue scales. Ozarks: body olive, dull green or blue-green, belly bright yellow to pale creamy yellow. Young are boldly patterned with brown or red-brown blotches and small dark spots on sides. Adults 30-60 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Active by day in fields, forests and forest edges March-November. Breeds late March-April, lays 5-30 eggs late May-June, eggs hatch August-September. Eats rodents, snakes, frogs and insects.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Great Plains Rat Snake

Pantherophis emoryi

Range An uncommon snake of the Ozark Plateau and Ouachita Mountains.

Description Weakly keeled scales. A brown to light gray body, dark brown to red-brown blotches on back. Belly white with black or dark gray square markings. Top of head has markings shaped like a spear point. Young patterned like adults. Adults 24-36 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits A snake of open forests, forest edges and rocky hillsides. Active from March-October. Breeds in spring, lays from 3-30 eggs that hatch by September. A constrictor; it feeds on rodents, birds, and in areas with caves, it will feed on bats.



JUVENILE



SUZANNE COLLINS

Black Rat Snake

Pantherophis obsoleta

Range Statewide.

Description Scales along back are weakly keeled. A large, shiny black snake, with white upper lip, chin and throat. Belly is white or creamy yellow with indistinct black blotches on the forward portion changing to mottled white, yellow, gray or brown on the hind portion of the body. Young have patterned body with light gray, dark brown to black blotches on back and sides, with black band between eyes extending down to corner of mouth. Adults average 42-72 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Forests and woodlands; an excellent climber. Active from March-November. Breeds April-May and lays from 5-20 eggs in June that hatch early autumn. Kills prey by constriction; feeds on rats, mice, birds and bird eggs. Will vibrate tail when threatened.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Eastern Hognose Snake

Heterodon platirhinos

Range Statewide, but very localized populations.

Description A stocky snake with upturned snout. Highly variable ground color can be tan, black, olive, yellow, red-orange or gray. Can be uniform in color or have a series of 20-30 brown or black blotches on back and bands on the tail. Belly can be gray, yellow, olive or red, mottled with green-gray or gray. Young patterned with brightly colored tan, yellow, brown or orange blotches. Adults average 20-33 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Found in a variety of habitats with sandy or loose soil. Active by day from March-October. Breeds April-May and lays 5-30 eggs that hatch August-September. Eats toads and frogs. When threatened will flatten head and neck, hiss and strike with mouth closed. Then it may writhe about, roll over and play dead.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Prairie Kingsnake

Lampropeltis calligaster

Range Almost statewide, apparently absent east of the White River.

Description Smooth, shiny scales. A brown, brown-gray or tan snake, patterned with darker brown or red-brown dark-edged, saddle-shaped blotches and bands. Top of head usually displays backward-pointing arrowhead mark. Old adults often become very dark. Belly is white or yellow with dark rectangular markings. Young patterned like adults, but more brightly colored. Adults average 30-42 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Occurs in open forests, pastures and prairie habitats. Active by day from March-October; nocturnal during hot summer months. Mates in spring, lays 5-17 eggs that hatch August-September. A constrictor that eats rodents, lizards and small snakes.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Speckled Kingsnake

Lampropeltis getula

Range Statewide.

Description Smooth, shiny scales. Body is black or dark brown, speckled with yellow or white spots. Spots sometimes form narrow bars on the back. Belly is yellow, patterned with irregular rectangular black markings. Young resemble adults. Adults average 36-48 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Habitats include swamps, bottomland hardwood forests, marshes, prairies, pastures and mixed pine-hardwood forests. Active from March-November. Breeds in early spring, lays 6-14 eggs under logs, stumps, rocks or decaying plant material. Eggs hatch in late summer months. Like all kingsnakes, it is a constrictor and eats rodents, lizards, birds and other snakes. Noted for its ability to eat venomous snakes.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Coachwhip

Masticophis flagellum

Range Almost statewide; absent from Mississippi Delta.

Description Smooth scales. A large, slender snake. Forward two-thirds of body is black, hind portion of body is tan or red-brown. Sometimes entire body is black. Belly may be yellow, tan, brown or pink. Young patterned with dark brown crossbands against a tan or yellow-brown background on the fore portion of body. Adults average 42-60 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Found in open forests, rocky glades and grasslands. Active on sunny days from April-October. Breeds in April-May; 8-24 eggs are laid in June or early July and hatch in August-September. Coachwhips are not constrictors. They chase down prey, subdue it with powerful jaws and swallow it whole. Mice, lizards, snakes and birds are eaten.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Rough Green Snake

Opheodrys aestivus

Range Statewide.

Description Keeled scales. This slender-bodied, bright green snake has a white or cream-colored belly. The tail is very long and makes up almost 40 percent of the total body length. The tail is used as an anchor when the snake is moving through the branches of bushes and brush. Young resemble adults. Adults average 22-32 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Rough green snakes are active during the day from April to early October. Our most arboreal (tree-dwelling) snake, it prefers the bushes or shrubs along the edge of streams and swamps. Also found on open brushy ridges. Breeding can occur in spring or autumn and from 1-10 eggs are laid in June-July. It specializes in feeding on caterpillars, grasshoppers, crickets, dragonflies, damselflies and spiders.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Western Ribbon Snake

Thamnophis proximus

Range Statewide.

Description Keeled scales. A striped snake with a yellow or orange stripe down center of back, and two creamy yellow stripes on the sides. These light stripes are separated by two wide, black stripes along the back. Head is black with a yellow or orange spot on the top. Belly is cream-colored or very pale green. Young patterned like adults. Adults average 20-30 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Prefers to live near the edges of swamps, sloughs, marshes, oxbow lakes, rivers and streams. Active March-October and breeds April-May. Gives live birth to an average of 12 young in August-September. The primary foods are amphibians and small fish. Occasionally eats earthworms. A member of the garter snake group, often called "garden snakes."



SUZANNE COLLINS

Common Garter Snake

Thamnophis sirtalis

Range Statewide.

Description Keeled scales. A striped snake with three light-colored yellow, green or blue stripes on the back, with two wide olive, black or brown stripes between the center light stripe and the stripes on either side. Belly is white, green or gray. Young resemble adults. Adults 18-24 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Found in a variety of wet habitats, marshes, floodplains, lake and pond edges and wet pastures. It is active by day from March-November. Mating takes place in spring or autumn and 5-80 young are born in late summer or early fall. It eats amphibians, earthworms, minnows, young rodents and small snakes.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Mud Snake

Farancia abacura

Range Mississippi Delta and Coastal Plain.

Description Glossy, smooth scales. Body is blue-black to black above; belly is red to crimson red, checkered with black bars. Red belly color extends onto the lower sides of the body. Young resemble adults. Adults 40-54 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits This thoroughly aquatic snake inhabits cypress/tupelo gum swamps, bottomland hardwood sloughs and the margins of cypress-lined oxbow lakes. Active from April-October; it breeds in spring. Females lay 11-50 eggs in rotten logs or stumps. Female remains with eggs until hatching in August-September. Feeds almost exclusively on amphiuma and lesser siren; both are large, totally aquatic salamanders. This snake is completely harmless and never attempts to bite.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Graham's Crayfish Snake

Regina grahamii

Range Mississippi Delta and Coastal Plain; isolated record from the western Arkansas River Valley.

Description Keeled scales. A brown or yellow-brown snake with yellow or dusky cream-colored stripes along the lower sides of the body. Belly is white or cream with a zigzag pattern of dark brown spots along the outer edge. Young patterned like adults. Adults 18-28 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Often seen in early spring basking on low branches or brush over water in marshes, ditches and sloughs. Active from April to early November. Mates in April-May; gives live birth in late summer to 4-35 young. Retreats into crayfish burrows during hot weather. Primary food is crayfish. Also eats tadpoles and frogs. Like other water snakes, it will discharge musk and feces when threatened.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Glossy Crayfish Snake

Regina rigida

Range Mississippi Delta and Coastal Plain.

Description Keeled scales. A brown to olive-brown snake with a tan stripe along the sides of the body just above the belly. Belly is cream-colored, patterned with two rows of black spots. Young patterned like adults. Adults average 14-24 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Glossy crayfish snakes inhabit the margins of swamps, marshes, sloughs and saturated soils of bottomland hardwood forests. This snake is active from March-October. Breeding in the spring, it gives birth to 6-14 young in August-September. Principal food is crayfish, but it also feeds on small fish, amphibians and aquatic insect larvae.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Queen Snake

Regina septemvittata

Range Restricted to isolated streams in the Ozark Plateau.

Description Keeled scales. Body is dark brown or slate, with cream-colored or yellow stripes along the sides of the body just above the belly. Belly is cream or yellow with two dark stripes. In older females, the belly may be dark. Young patterned like adults. Adults average 15-24 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Occurs along the margins of rocky bottomed streams, marshes, oxbow lakes, rivers and streams. Active from late March-October; this snake breeds in spring or fall and 7-10 young are born August-September. Feeds on crayfish, small fish and aquatic insect larvae. Arkansas has the only population of this species west of the Mississippi River.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Eastern & Western Worm Snake

Carphophis amoenus & *Carphophis vermis*

Range Crowley's Ridge, Ozark Plateau, Ouachita Mountains and western Coastal Plain.

Description Shiny, smooth scales. Eastern worm snake: uniform brown above, belly and one to two scale rows above are pink. Western worm snake: purplish black or black above, belly and three scale rows above are pink. Head is flattened to aid in burrowing. Young resemble adults. Adults 7-11 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Inhabits forests, rocky, wooded hillsides and forest edges. Active from March-November; breeds in spring and fall, lays 1-5 eggs which hatch in August. Feeds exclusively on earthworms. A few scattered records exist from the Mississippi Delta, but most of the suitable habitat in this region has been cleared for agriculture.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Ringneck Snake

Diadophis punctatus

Range Statewide, but only two records known east of the White River.

Description Smooth scales. Head and body can be gray-black, blue-black or gray-brown. Belly is yellow with black spots. Conspicuous yellow or light orange ring around the neck. Young patterned like adults. Adults 10-14 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits This snake can be found in forests, woodland edges, pastures and rocky glades. It is active from March-November; most often found under cover of rocks or logs. Breeds March-April and lays 2-10 eggs that hatch August-September. Primarily eats earthworms, but insects, small lizards and salamanders have also been reported as foods.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Ground Snake

Sonora semiannulata

Range Two records from Benton County.

Description Smooth scales. A snake with variable color and pattern; color may be red-brown, gray or tan. Can be unpatterned or have black crossbars on the back. Belly is white or cream-colored. Young look like adults. Adults 8-12 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits An inhabitant of dry, rocky cedar glades or rocky, open forests with southerly exposures. Active from April-October; it breeds in spring or fall and lays 4-6 eggs that hatch in late summer. Feeds on scorpions, centipedes, spiders and small insects. It is the rarest known snake in Arkansas.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Brown Snake

Storeria dekayi

Range Statewide.

Description Scales keeled. Color can vary from light yellow-brown, gray, red-brown, to dark brown. Light gray or brown stripe down center of back, bordered by two rows of black, brown or dark gray spots. Belly can be cream-colored, pink or yellow. Top of head is dark with two large black spots on either side of neck. Young patterned like adults, but darker. Adults average 9-13 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Prefers moist environments of forests, woodland edge, swamps and floodplains. Active late March-October, breeds in spring or fall and gives birth to 3-31 young from late July-September. Feeds on earthworms, slugs and land snails. Blunt heads and elongated teeth allow brown and redbelly (opposite page) snakes to extract land snails from their shells.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Redbelly Snake

Storeria occipitomaculata

Range Statewide, but very few records from the Mississippi Delta.

Description Scales keeled. Body may be gray, brown, red-brown, yellow-brown or blue-black. Belly generally red, but can be yellow, black, orange or pink. Head darker than body. Nape of neck has three light spots, often forming a "collar." Young patterned like adults. Adults average 8-10 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Inhabits moist forests, hiding under logs, rocks and leaf litter. This snake is active from March-October and breeds in spring and fall with 2-18 young born in late summer or early autumn. Diet consists of earthworms, slugs and land snails. Populations require intact forest habitat to survive.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Flathead Snake

Tantilla gracilis

Range Ozark Plateau, Ouachita Mountains, Coastal Plain, and one known locality from Crowley's Ridge. Absent from Mississippi Delta.

Description Scales smooth. A small, light brown, tan or red-brown snake with a salmon pink belly. The head is dark brown or gray. Young resemble adults. Adults 7-8 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits A burrowing snake, it is active from March-October. Found in rocky, open forests or pastures, or in upland mixed pine-hardwood forests. Mating occurs in spring; 1-4 eggs are laid in moist soil under rocks or logs. Eggs hatch August-September. Feeds on scorpions, spiders, centipedes and insect larvae.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Rough Earth Snake

Virginia striatula

Range Statewide, very few records for Mississippi Delta.

Description Keeled scales on back. Body is uniform brown, red-brown or gray. Belly is white, cream-colored or light gray. This snake must be examined closely to distinguish it from the smooth earth snake. Young resemble adults. Adults 7-10 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits Prefers rocky, wooded hillsides, forest edges, bottomland hardwood forests and pine forests. Active from April-October and can be found in rotting stumps and logs in winter months. Breeds April-May and 2-9 young are born July-September. Earthworms are primary food, but also eats slugs, snails and insects.



SUZANNE COLLINS

Smooth Earth Snake

Virginia valeriae

Range Ozark Plateau, Ouachita Mountains and Coastal Plain. Absent from Crowley's Ridge and Mississippi Delta.

Description Smooth or weakly keeled scales. A plain-colored snake, body is brown, gray or red-brown. Belly is white, cream-colored or light yellow. Young resemble adults. Adults 7-10 inches in length.

Habitat and Habits This small snake is active from April-October in moist forests with ample rocks, logs or leaf litter to hide under. It breeds in spring or fall and gives live birth in late summer to 2-14 young. Like many other small woodland snakes, it eats earthworms, slugs and soft-bodied insects. Much of this snake's former habitat has been converted to other uses for human activities.

Venomous Snakebite

PREVENTION AND PRECAUTIONS

Whether you are working in the yard, hiking, hunting or fishing — a few simple things can help prevent you from being bitten by a venomous snake.

Be alert. Snakes are naturally camouflaged and blend into their surroundings.

Watch where you place your hands and feet.

Wear heavy leather work gloves and leather boots or snake/brush chaps, depending upon your activity.

Leave snakes alone and they will leave you alone. Snakes are just as afraid of humans as humans may be of snakes. If given a chance, they will move away from human activity.

Snakes are not naturally aggressive and will not “attack” unsuspecting humans. They will defend themselves by biting only if they are cornered or feel threatened.



Venomous Snakebite

DO'S AND DON'TS

Statistically speaking, your chances of being bitten by a venomous snake are less than being killed in an automobile accident or being struck by lightning. But in the rare event that a venomous snake bites you, following a few simple rules will increase your chances for a successful recovery.

Snakebite symptoms include pain, swelling, discoloration of the skin at the site of the bite, nausea and/or vomiting.

Remain calm. Remember: More people die from bee stings each year than from venomous snakebites.

Remove shoes, jewelry and tight clothing from bitten area.

Wash the bite site with soap and warm water or rubbing alcohol to remove any excess venom.

Be prepared to treat for shock and possibly administer CPR.

Get the victim to the nearest medical facility as soon as possible. The best snakebite first aid is a set of car keys.

On the other hand, there are several things you should not do when treating a snakebite victim:

Do not attempt to capture, handle or kill a venomous snake. More people are bitten during these activities than in any other situation.

Do not make cuts or incisions on or near the bitten area. You could cut nerves, tendons or blood vessels — potentially causing more damage than the snakebite.

Do not apply a tourniquet or constriction band. If tied too tight, you could cut off blood flow — causing more damage than the snakebite.

Do not give the victim food, drink, alcohol or other drugs. This can cause complications in the successful treatment of the bite.

Do not attempt to suck venom out with your mouth. You could have a cold sore or other open wound in your mouth, allowing venom to get into your bloodstream.

Snake Facts

TRUE OR FALSE?

Answers on opposite page.

1. Snakes are aggressive and will chase or “attack” a person.
2. Snakes always travel in pairs.
3. If you kill a snake the mate will soon follow.
4. A snake's tongue can sting you.
5. A female snake will swallow its young to protect them.
6. A snake can spit venom.
7. Every snake seen in water is a cottonmouth.
8. Snakes are slimy.
9. A snake does not die until sundown.
10. Snakes congregate in “balls or nests.”
11. Snakes can shed their skin a couple of times a year.
12. Some nonvenomous snakes will vibrate their tails when threatened or alarmed.
13. The head of a venomous snake can still bite after being severed from the body.

1. **False.** If alarmed, a snake may crawl toward a person if the person is between the snake and its hiding place. Snakes will defend themselves by biting when attacked or feeling threatened, otherwise they will attempt to retreat from humans.
2. **False.** During the breeding season, a male and female snake may be found together just before or during mating. They go their separate ways after mating.
3. **False.** In the breeding season, a male snake will follow the scent of a female that is ready to breed, but they do not travel in pairs year-round (see above).
4. **False.** A snake's tongue is used strictly for smelling and is as harmless as a human tongue.
5. **False.** The young would die from the strong digestive acids in the stomach.
6. **False.** There are no venomous snakes native to North or South America that can spit venom.
7. **False.** There are several kinds of harmless water snakes that are mistaken as cottonmouths.
8. **False.** Since snakes are not warm-blooded like mammals and birds, they feel cool to the touch, but they are not slimy.
9. **False.** If the head is chopped off, or the body is cut in two or crushed by a large object, the snake will die immediately.
10. **False.** Snakes do not mass together in a "ball or nest."
11. **True.** Snakes shed their skin as they grow larger, but the frequency of shedding depends on how much food the snake is able to obtain in a growing season.
12. **True.** Kingsnakes and rat snakes will often vibrate their tails when threatened, and when this is done against dried leaves or similar material, the result can sound like a rattlesnake.
13. **True.** For a short time after decapitation, the latent nerves in the head can cause the head to bite.

Snake Prevention

KEEPING SNAKES OUT OF YOUR YARD

During the warm months, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission receives many calls from the public about how to prevent the presence of snakes on their property. Several commercial products claim to repel snakes, although none has been shown to be effective. Many people put out sulfur powder or mothballs but the most this might do is kill a few insects for a short period of time. To reduce the likelihood of snakes occurring in and around your home, yard or outbuildings, we recommend a few simple “housekeeping” chores.

- Keep lawn and surrounding grounds mowed short and trim around all building foundations. Snakes do not like to move over open ground, which makes them vulnerable to predators.
- Remove piles of logs, brush, rocks or other debris on the ground. This provides cover for snakes and the animals that snakes feed on. If you reduce the presence of cover and food, then you reduce the potential presence of snakes!
- Make sure your home is well-sealed. Replace worn weather stripping around doors. Use caulk, mortar or spray foam in a can to seal up cracks in the foundation and around plumbing, heating/cooling and electrical ducts.

- Minimize mulch and low-growing flower or plant beds immediately around the house. These can provide cover for snakes and the animals that snakes feed on.

If you live in the country, with nearby natural habitat, the potential for snakes to be around your home and outbuildings is increased, so be prepared for possible snake encounters. Urban dwellers have the least likelihood of encountering snakes.

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