

Identifying a Rattlesnake

If you believe that there is a rattlesnake in your yard, do not approach it or kill it. Move all children and pets to a safe, indoor area away from the snake, and alert your local Animal Care and Control office.

Rattlesnakes can be difficult to distinguish from other snake species.



Rattlesnakes are thick, heavy-bodied snakes with an obvious triangular-shaped head. Be aware that not all rattlesnakes will have a rattle present. The rattles may be broken or lost, and are not present in juvenile rattlesnakes.

Rattlesnakes have an obvious "neck" region, where the body narrows significantly behind the head. Rattlesnakes have hooded eyes, with elliptical pupils.



Gopher Snake Garter Snake Striped Racer

Some non-venomous snakes, such as gopher snakes, are often confused with rattlesnakes due to their similar color, and will often take the same defensive posture as rattlesnakes when threatened. Some snakes will even imitate rattlesnakes by shaking their tail (rattles are never present in any other California snake species) and striking.

Rattlesnake Myths & Fun Facts

Myth: You can tell the age of a rattlesnake by how many rattles they have as one rattle is added each year.

Truth: Rattlesnakes gain new rattles when they shed their skin, which can be several times a year. Rattlesnakes also lose or break off rattles frequently.

Did You Know? Rattlesnakes can climb trees and swim!

Did You Know? Rattlesnakes give birth to live young. They do not lay eggs.

Myth: Removing a rattlesnake's fangs will render them harmless.

Truth: Rattlesnakes will re-grow their fangs! Never handle a rattlesnake or try to remove their fangs. They are not pets.

Did You Know? Adult rattlesnakes will eat a meal about every 2 weeks, depending on the size of their last meal. Young rattlesnakes will eat more often, about once a week.

Myth: Rattlesnakes can only strike from a coiled position.

Truth: Rattlesnakes can actually strike from any position, so caution must be taken at all times.

Did You Know? A rattlesnake can move its tail back and forth 60 times or more per second!

Did You Know? California Kingsnakes kill and eat rattlesnakes!

**For more information, please call
(661) 259-7721 or visit our website at
www.placerita.org**

Placerita Canyon Nature Center



Rattlesnakes

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Rattlesnakes are venomous snakes found in California and include several different

species. During the hot summer months, rattlesnakes are primarily nocturnal (active at night) and crepuscular (active at dawn and dusk). During moderately warm periods, they can also be active in daylight hours. Rattlesnakes are least active during cold, winter months.

They have an excellent sense of smell, and flick their tongue to carry scent bearing particles to the Jacobson's organ in the roof of their mouth. They are pit vipers and detect heat with "pits" on their faces, enabling them to locate and strike warm blooded prey at night. Rattlesnakes do not have external ears; therefore, they do not have a good sense of sound. Instead, they are able to sense vibrations around them.

Rattlesnakes are generally non-aggressive animals, and often only strike when threatened. Most bites occur between the months of April and October when humans and rattlesnakes are most likely to encounter each other. According to the California Poison Control Center, there are approximately 800 bites to humans each year, with only 1 or 2 resulting in death. It is estimated that 25% of rattlesnake bites are "dry" bites, meaning that no venom is injected. Although no venom is injected, immediate medical attention is still required.

Rattlesnakes are a normal and important part of our ecosystem, and benefit humans by naturally controlling pest populations.

How to Avoid Rattlesnake Bites

- ❖ Always wear long, loose fitting pants and hiking boots. Avoid open toed shoes.
- ❖ When hiking, stay on well-used trails. Avoid walking in areas with tall grass or thick brush.
- ❖ Be aware of your surroundings. Do not step or place hands where you cannot see completely.
- ❖ Teach children to respect all snakes and animals, and warn them to never touch or pick up any snake.
- ❖ Keep all dogs on a leash and close to you. Consider enrolling your dog in a rattlesnake avoidance class.
- ❖ Never handle a dead snake; freshly killed snakes are still able to inject venom.
- ❖ Be aware that not all rattlesnakes will rattle before striking.

How to Handle a Snake Bite

- ❖ Stay Calm!
- ❖ Wash the bite area gently with soap and water.
- ❖ Do not apply a tourniquet.
- ❖ Keep the bitten area below the heart.
- ❖ Remove all jewelry that may constrict swelling.
- ❖ Never try to "suck out" the venom.
- ❖ Immobilize the affected area.
- ❖ Transport safely and immediately to the nearest medical facility or call 911.
- ❖ If treated promptly by a medical professional, adults will often only suffer localized tissue damage. Children and animals are at a higher risk of suffering serious complications or death.

Rattlesnake Species Found in Southern California

Southern Pacific Rattlesnake

Crotalus oreganus helleri



Northern Mojave Rattlesnake

Crotalus scutulatus scutulatus

(commonly known as "Mojave green")



Mojave Desert Sidewinder

Crotalus cerastes cerastes



- **What is the difference between the species?** The different species of rattlesnake vary in size and color, and utilize different toxins such as neurotoxins and hemotoxins.
- **How long do they live?** In the wild, rattlesnakes often live up to 10 years.
- **What do they eat?** Rattlesnakes eat a variety of animals including lizards, rats, mice, frogs and birds.
- **How big do they get?** On average, rattlesnakes will grow to 4-6 feet, but can be longer depending on the species.