



## About

- The rattlesnake is California's only native venomous snake. <sup>\*1</sup>
- Nine species are found in various areas of the state. <sup>\*1</sup>
- Their size may vary, and adults of some species may reach 6 feet in length. <sup>\*1</sup>
- Rattlesnakes are an important part of the ecosystem, feeding on rodents, birds, and other small animals. <sup>\*1</sup>
- Nationwide, there are over 800 cases of rattlesnake bites reported annually to the American Association of Poison Control Centers. Of these reported bites, only one to two cases per year result in death of the patient. The majority of rattlesnake bites are successfully treated with as little as two to three days of hospitalization. <sup>\*3</sup>

## Identifying

- Rattlesnakes have a distinctive, triangular-shaped head, which can be helpful in their identification. <sup>\*1</sup>
- As their name implies, most have a rattle on the tail end. <sup>\*1</sup>
- Rattlesnakes have a powerful body and thin neck, leading into a well-defined arrow-shaped head. <sup>\*3</sup>
- The rattle lies at the end of the tail and is composed of interlocking horny segments of shed skin. <sup>\*1</sup>
- Young rattlesnakes are born with a small rattle or button. A new segment is formed each time the skin is shed, which may occur several times a year. Because rattles can shorten or be broken off completely, the lack of a rattle does not mean the snake is not a rattlesnake. <sup>\*1</sup>
- Using the snake's color or pattern is NOT a reliable method of identification. Looking for the characteristic rattle on the tail is a good method, though sometimes these rattles are lost <sup>\*3</sup>

## Behavior

- Most rattlesnakes forage for prey in or near brushy or tall grass areas, rock outcrops, rodent burrows, around and under surface objects, and sometimes in the open. <sup>\*1</sup>
- Adult Rattlers eat live prey, primarily rodents; the young consume mostly lizards and young rodents. To catch their prey, rattlesnakes wait until a prey animal is nearby. The snake strikes with two large fangs that inject venom. This subdues and usually kills the prey, which is then swallowed whole. <sup>\*1</sup>
- When inactive, most rattlesnakes seek cover in crevices of rocks, under surface objects, beneath dense vegetation, and in rodent burrows. In some areas, rattlesnakes hibernate for several months in the crevices of rock accumulations. <sup>\*1</sup>

## Rattlesnakes vs. Other Snakes

- The harmless gopher snake (*Pituophis catenifer*) appears similar to rattlesnakes and can alter its posture to mimic the triangular head shape but will always lack a rattle. <sup>\*1</sup>
- All snakes with pointed tails in California are non-venomous. Even newborn rattlesnakes have a rattle segment called a "button" at the end of their tails (never a pointed tail), and adults may have several rattles. <sup>\*2</sup>
- Rattlesnakes also have flat and broad, or triangular-shaped heads. The pupils (black portion) of a rattlesnake's eyes are cat-like or elliptical, whereas non-venomous snakes have round pupils. <sup>\*2</sup>
- In comparison, a non-poisonous snake tends to look more like a snake a child rolls out of clay: the head, neck and body have more-or-less the same diameter. They do not share the distinct skinny neck of the rattlesnake. (*Please note: This is true only of snakes native to California and does not apply to exotic snakes or snakes imported into California from elsewhere.*) <sup>\*3</sup>

## What to do

- Hands, feet, and ankles are the most common sites for rattlesnake bites. <sup>\*3</sup>
- Never go barefooted or wear open sandals when walking in rough or unpaved terrain. <sup>\*3</sup>
- Always stay on paths. Avoid tall grass, weeds and heavy underbrush where there may be snakes. <sup>\*3</sup>
- Always look for concealed snakes before picking up rocks, sticks or firewood. <sup>\*3</sup>
- Always check carefully around stumps or logs before sitting. <sup>\*3</sup>
- When climbing, always look before putting your hands in a new location. Snakes can climb walls, trees and rocks and are frequently found at high altitudes. <sup>\*3</sup>
- Never grab "sticks" or "branches" while swimming. Rattlesnakes are excellent swimmers. <sup>\*3</sup>
- Teach children to respect snakes and to leave snakes alone. Curious children who pick up snakes could be bitten. <sup>\*3</sup>
- Always give snakes the right of way! <sup>\*3</sup>
- Stay at least a body length away from any snake you encounter, until you are certain it is not a rattlesnake. Although rattlesnakes normally strike only 1/2 their body length, they can strike farther if they are facing downhill. Most rattlesnakes are not aggressive, but they may come towards you inadvertently when seeking escape cover. <sup>\*2</sup>

## What If Someone Is Bitten?


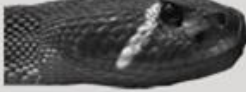


























- A snakebite emergency plan should be developed before it is needed.
- Call 9-1-1 immediately!
- Try to calm the victim.
- Gently wash the area with soap and water.
- Apply a cold, wet cloth over the bite.

\*1 © 2016 Regents of the University of California, Statewide Integrated Pest management Program, <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74119.html>

\*2 Copyright © 1999-2011 - Southern Sierra High Adventure Team  
<http://www.bsahighadventure.org/camping/snakes.html>

\*3 Information provided by the California Poison Control System and San Diego Zoo websites. <http://www.rsf-fire.org/prepare/safety/rattlesnakes.html>

# Identification of California Rattlesnakes

		Tail Pattern	Head Scales
<p><b>Crotalus atrox</b></p> <p>Body Pattern    white head line</p>   <p>southeastern corner of Ca    Distribution</p>	 <p>starts with black</p> <p>white part little bit larger</p>		
<p><b>Crotalus mitchellii pyrrhus</b></p>   <p>southeastern California</p>			
<p><b>Crotalus ruber</b></p> <p>reddish / brownish coloration</p>   <p>southwestern California</p>	 <p>starts with black</p> <p>white part little bit larger</p>		
<p><b>Crotalus oreganus helleri</b></p>   <p>southwestern California</p>	 <p>dark part larger than white part</p>		
<p><b>Crotalus oreganus oreganus</b></p>   <p>central and northwestern California</p>	 <p>black part larger than white part</p>		
<p><b>Crotalus scutulatus</b></p> <p>white head line</p>   <p>interior southern California</p>	 <p>starts with white</p> <p>white part 2-3 times larger than black part</p>	 <p>large head scales</p>	
<p><b>Crotalus stephensi</b></p>   <p>interior southern California</p>			

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Frank Buchter contributed this chart to help identify rattlesnakes in California © 2000 – 2017 California Herps, **A Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of California** <http://www.californiaherps.com/identification/snakesid/rattlesnakes.html>