

RATTLESNAKE INFORMATION

The rattlesnake's role as an important link in the food web far outweighs its potential danger to our well being. In fact, rodent-borne diseases are probably controlled to a great extent by rattlesnakes and other predators. Offer them respect, observe them from a safe distance, and then leave them to perform their valuable ecological function.



Most rattlesnakes have relatively weak venoms when compared to the world's true vipers and cobras. Our local species, the Southern Pacific Rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*) is one of 30 species of rattlesnakes in the family Crotalus. The venom of the Pacific rattlesnake is a potent neurotoxin but the snake is not considered particularly dangerous because of its demure manner.

Rattlesnakes will make every effort to avoid contact with people. Humans are far more dangerous to this secretive animal than it is to us. Many bites are the result of someone trying to capture, kill, or handle the snake, and a good number of bites occur to snake keepers, both private and professional. The bite is a defensive reaction and should not be considered an act of aggression. The rattlesnake's rattle offers the snake a means of communication, designed to warn larger animals of their position.

In the United States, humans experience about 8000 bites from venomous snakes each year. Of those, an average of 12 per year, less than 1%, result in death. While death is not likely, rattlesnake bites are extremely painful and it takes a very long time for the wound to recover from an envenomated rattlesnake bite.

AVOIDING RATTLESNAKES/BITES

Rattlesnakes can be found in rock piles, woodpiles, shady areas when the temperatures are high and sunning themselves on rocks or in the middle of a road during cool periods.

At Sedgwick, rattlesnakes are most commonly encountered in spring (when ground squirrels are born) and fall. During the heat of the summer they are sometimes seen in the early evening and after dark.

Carry a long walking/snake stick, (for rustling brush before going in), a flash light, and wear heavy high boots. The key is situational awareness, and making sure you are heard and felt by the snakes, they have more fear of you and will flee.

Don't walk quietly or softly and never ever venture into a space you cannot visually check.

Don't walk through high brush, if you can't clearly see the ground. Most people step on snakes because they are not looking where they step.

The same applies for climbing around - don't stick your hands in places you can't visually check.

If you become aware of a (rattle)snake in your path, take another route. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO CAPTURE, HANDLE OR MOVE IT. Leave it alone and it will leave you alone.

TAKE THESE PRECAUTIONS when going into areas where rattlesnakes might be encountered:

1. Wear over-the-ankle or calf high boots and loose fitting long pants.
2. Do not step or put your hands where you cannot see (don't place your hands on unseen ledges or into animal holes).
3. Don't turn rocks or boards over with bare hands. Use a tool.
4. Avoid wandering around in the dark.
5. Step on logs and rocks, never over them, and be especially careful when climbing over things.
6. Avoid walking through dense brush tall grass, if you must use a long stick or branch to beat the brush before you as you go. Remember that the snake doesn't want anything to do with you either.
7. Be careful when stepping over doorsteps as well. Snakes like to crawl along the edge of buildings where they are protected on one side.
8. If you do get bitten, call ahead to the nearest hospital (Santa Ynez hospital, 700 Alamo Pintado Road, Solvang, 688-6431) because even mild cases of envenomation often require eight or more vials of the anti-venom and sometimes these are in short supply.

WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF A SNAKE BITE

1. Try to remain calm and inactive.
2. Get to a hospital or doctor as soon as possible (have someone else drive).
3. Loosen or remove any restrictive clothing or jewelry (e.g. shoes, watch) from the area near the bite.
4. Watch the victim for signs of shock. Treat if necessary by lying flat with feet elevated and cover with warm clothes or blanket.
5. Identify or photograph the snake only if it remains visible from a safe distance.
6. Circle the bite using a Sharpie-type pen and record the time of the bite, on the patient's skin if necessary. En route to treatment, circle the swelling area and record the time. The rate of swelling will help physicians determine how much venom (if any) was injected by the snake.

WHAT NOT TO DO

1. Don't make incisions over the snakebite.
2. Don't constrict the flow of blood.
3. Don't immerse a limb in ice water.
3. Don't elevate the bitten area (this will increase the flow of venom to other tissues).
4. Don't use your mouth to extract venom. Sucking out the venom is no longer a recommended practice, and wastes valuable time.
5. Don't run or carry unnecessary items as you go for help, to avoid elevating your pulse rate.
6. Don't try to catch or kill the snake.
7. Don't administer any pain medications or antihistamines, unless instructed by a doctor or EMT.

Though uncommon, rattlesnake bites do occur. The most important thing to do if bitten is to stay calm. Generally, the most serious effect of a rattlesnake bite to an adult is local tissue damage, which needs to be treated. Children, because they are smaller, are in more danger if they are bitten. Get to a doctor as soon as possible, but stay calm. Frenetic, high-speed driving places the victim at greater risk of an accident and increased heart rate. Remember, about one-third of all rattlesnake bites are "dry" bites, when no venom has been injected.

TREATMENT

The most common treatment at a hospital or other medical facility to counter the effects of snake venom includes the injection of an antivenin (or antivenom). Injecting small amounts of venom into a horse makes antivenin. The horse's immune system provides a defense against the venom. The horse's blood serum is then used in antivenin and given to human bite victims to counteract the effects of the bite. Only qualified medical personnel should administer antivenin. There are often side effects to be considered. It's also really expensive, but don't let that stop you from taking it.

Treatment may also involve care given to relieve swelling, tetanus, or local tissue damage. North American pit viper venom (rattlesnake, water moccasin, copperhead) is primarily hemotoxic, acting to destroy blood and muscle tissue.

RATTLESNAKE FACTS

Rattlesnakes are members of the Viperidae family of snakes (pit vipers), a family that also includes copperheads, vipers and more. All members of this family are venomous.



Like other members of the Viperidae family, the rattlesnakes are called pit vipers because they have a heat-sensing pit on each side of their head, roughly between the nostril and the eye. These pits are used to detect warm-blooded prey. Rattlesnakes can detect differences in temperature down to a fraction of a degree.

Rattlesnakes are ovoviviparous, which means they give birth to live young (5 to 20 at a time). They do not lay eggs like most North American snakes. Instead, the female retains the egg inside her body. So the baby rattlesnakes are born fully formed, ready to hunt and ready to defend themselves!

Counting the "buttons" on a rattlesnake's rattle is not an accurate measure of the snake's age. Rattlesnakes get extra buttons in conjunction with how often they shed, and they may shed several times in a year. The buttons on the end of the rattle tend to break off, as well. A new segment is added to the rattle after each shedding of the skin, and rattlesnakes shed their skin more or less often depending on many factors (e.g., food intake, temperature, etc.); therefore, one cannot determine the age of a rattlesnake by counting the rattle's segments. The rattle rattles as segments brush against one another (not like a kid's rattle that has something inside).

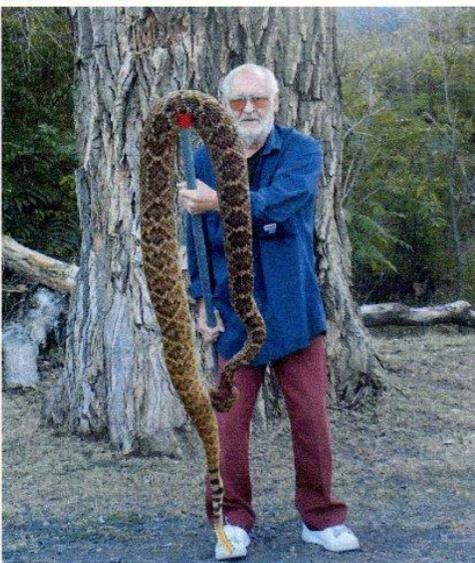
The rattle of an alarmed rattlesnake can be heard from 60 feet away.

The average rattlesnake has a life span of an amazing 20 years.

Fangs are like retractable hypodermic needles.

Venom breaks down blood and/or paralyzes nerves, useful for subduing prey and beginning the digestive process (and warding off threats).

Animals with a keen sense of smell can be trained to avoid rattlesnakes due to their distinctive cucumber smell.



At least the rattlesnakes at Sedgwick don't get to be this big!

Arizona Man Kills Record Western Diamondback

By Euben Hadd
THE ARIZONA GAZETTE

GLOBE - Lowell "Butch" Burns, of Globe, Arizona killed a monster rattlesnake October 26, 2008 during an overnight campout up on Gobbler's Knob near the Sabino Basin. Burns was walking near his camp when he stepped close and the snake buzzed a warning. He said "At first I wasn't sure I wanted to do battle with so formidable a critter but I sure

didn't want him to be roaming around my campsite." Burns notified the authorities to report the incident and the snake was measured at a world record 8ft. 10in. The snake was packed in ice, then given, by request, to the Arizona State University Herpetology Department for study and preservation. For further information, see: www.asucentral.com