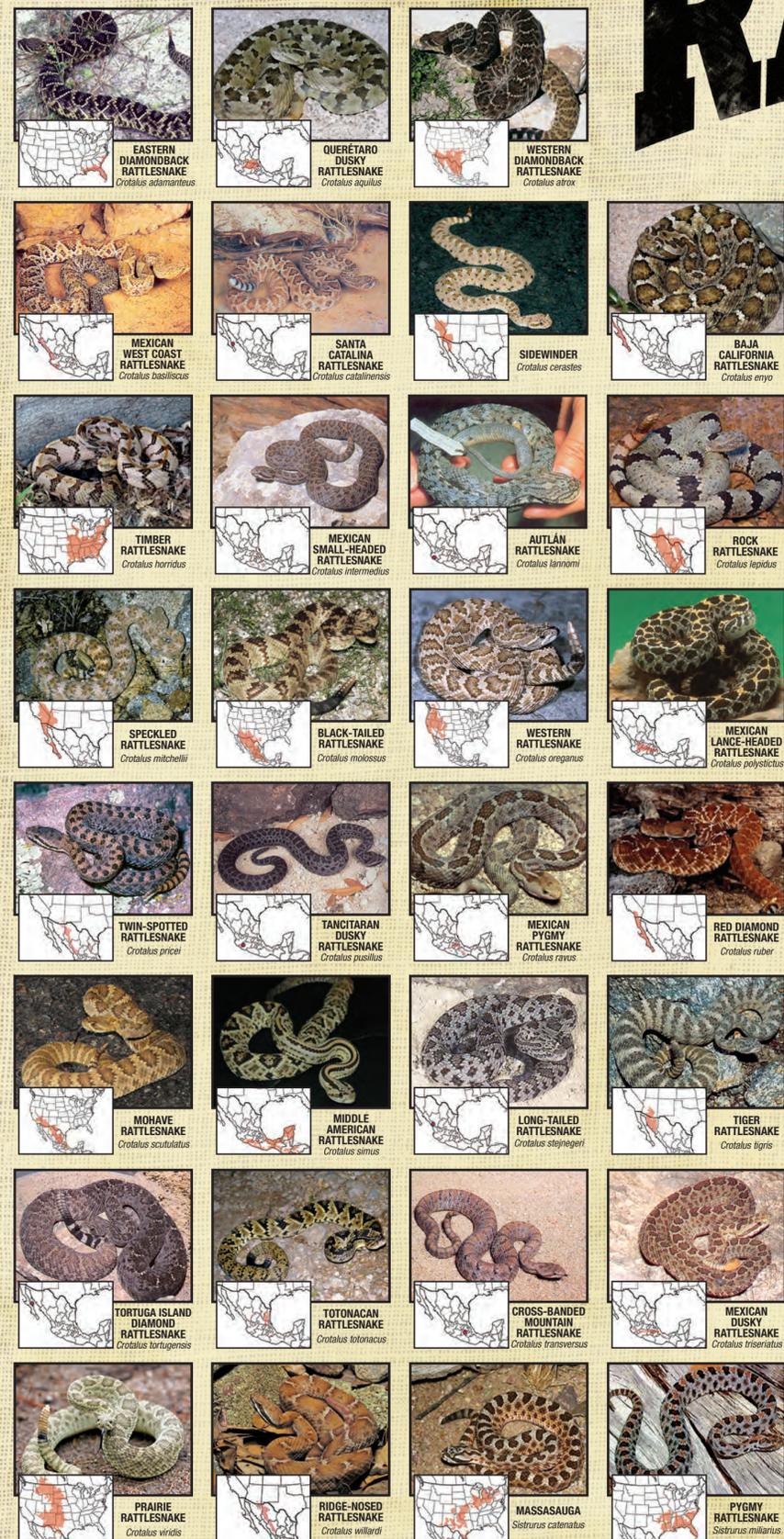


DISTRIBUTION & APPEARANCE



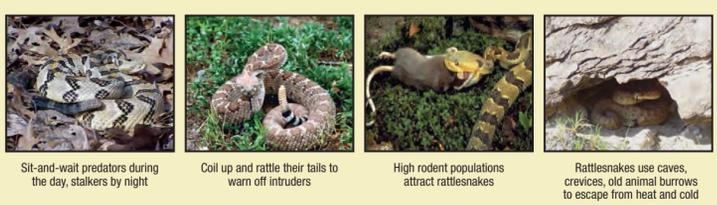
NORTH AMERICAN RATTLESNAKES

BEHAVIOR & HABITATS

Rattlesnakes can be encountered in many types of terrain including coastal sand dunes, forests, savanna, deserts, as well as rocky hills and mountainsides



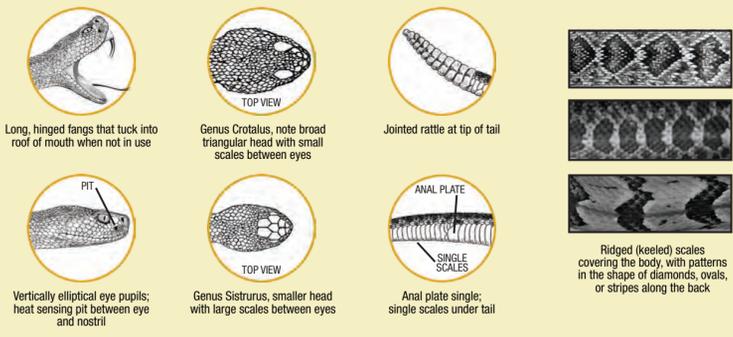
- ◆ Sit-and-wait predators during the day: remain coiled next to a regularly used animal path, and wait silently for prey to come within striking distance
- ◆ Active hunters at night and during rainy, overcast days; most active on calm warm nights
- ◆ Tail rattle is shaken vigorously to warn off intruders
- ◆ Some species are relatively docile while others are quite aggressive when approached
- ◆ Common in areas with abundant rodents; often found near farms and towns
- ◆ During the winter months, rattlesnakes hibernate in groups in rocky outcroppings, tree stumps or animal burrows



Sit-and-wait predators during the day, stalkers by night | Coil up and rattle their tails to warn off intruders | High rodent populations attract rattlesnakes | Rattlesnakes use caves, crevices, old animal burrows to escape from heat and cold

IDENTIFICATION

All of the rattlesnakes found in North America are pit vipers. They are divided between two genera, *Crotalus* and *Sistrurus*, based on the size of the head scales between the eyes. Different species vary widely in adult size: some reach barely 2 feet in length while others can grow to 8 feet.



Vertically elliptical eye pupils; heat sensing pit between eye and nostril | Genus *Sistrurus*, smaller head with large scales between eyes | Anal plate single; single scales under tail | Ridged (keeled) scales covering the body, with patterns in the shape of diamonds, ovals, or stripes along the back

VENOM & EFFECTS



Venom delivered through hollow front fangs | Rattlesnake bite wound

- ◆ Rattlesnakes use their venom to capture and digest their prey.
- ◆ Venom is delivered through long, hollow fangs at the front of the mouth.
- ◆ Large rattlesnake species are especially dangerous. They can strike about 1/3 to 1/2 their body length, inflict deep puncture wounds, and inject large amounts of venom.
- ◆ It is possible to be bitten by a rattlesnake and not be poisoned, since the snake does not always inject venom. When a rattlesnake injects venom, pain is usually immediate.
- ◆ Rattlesnake venom is a complex mixture of compounds that destroy blood cells and muscle tissues and prevent wounds from healing.
- ◆ Snakebite victims may experience nausea, a fall in blood pressure, weakness, rapid pulse, shortness of breath, vomiting, and kidney failure.
- ◆ There may be severe swelling, blistering, bleeding and discoloration at the bite site.
- ◆ Destruction of skin, cartilage, and muscle tissue can occur around the bite site.
- ◆ Death from internal bleeding, muscle paralysis or shock can result from a severe bite left untreated.



Initial effects (swelling) of rattlesnake venom | Tissue damage from rattlesnake venom

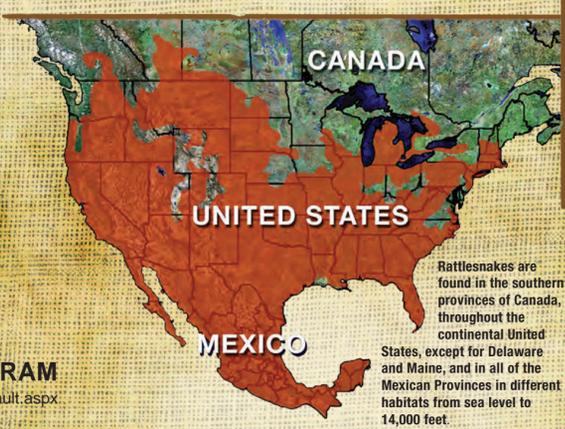
FIRST AID

- ◆ Stay calm and move victim and any onlookers away from the snake. If possible, close off area where snake was seen and restrict access until area is cleared by preventive medicine, vector-control or other appropriate personnel.
- ◆ Have the victim lie down immediately; reassure and calm the victim.
- ◆ Remove constrictive items (jewelry, watches, rings, clothing or shoes). Lightly immobilize the injured part of body and place in a comfortable position. **DO NOT** apply tourniquet or try to cut and draw out venom.
- ◆ Record the appearance and progress of symptoms in as much detail as possible.
- ◆ Safely try to note the appearance of the snake (shape of head, body color, length, etc.)

Rattlesnake bites cannot be treated in the field. Do not waste valuable time trying. Seek medical attention right away. Properly equipped medical facilities can effectively treat snakebites. Antivenins are available to treat the symptoms of the venoms of North American rattlesnakes.

PREVENTION

- ◆ **LEAVE ALL SNAKES ALONE!** Venomous snakes are found throughout North America. Treat all snakes you encounter as venomous and deadly. Many people are bitten because they try to kill a snake or get a closer look at it.
- ◆ Snakebites occur most often:
 - After rainstorms that follow long, dry spells or after rains in desert areas.
 - During the half-hour before total darkness and the first two hours after dark.
- ◆ As tactical situations permit, avoid high risk snake habitats. Locate bivouacs away from piles of brush, rocks, or other debris.
- ◆ Eliminate objects that can hide or attract snakes:
 - Remove wood and rock piles, construction debris, dumps, high grass or dense undergrowth.
 - Practice good sanitation by removing clutter/trash and store supplies elevated off the ground.
 - Control rodents and other prey animals that will attract snakes into your area.
- ◆ To keep snakes out of dining, living and work areas keep windows and doors closed whenever possible and make sure screens are tightly fitted, without holes and in good working order. Also seal or block holes in foundations, crawlspaces and roofs.
- ◆ Practice "SNAKE-SMART" behavior:
 - Shake out bedding and clothes before use and sleep off the ground, if possible. Using a zipped pop-up bed net will provide protection in open outdoor areas.
 - Wear thick leather boots for the best foot protection. Never walk barefoot or in shower shoes outside.
 - Avoid walking alone and keep to clear paths. Always use a flashlight at night.
 - Watch where you put your hands and where you step especially in natural environments. Don't reach or step into places you cannot directly see into.
 - Be alert to and avoid areas where snakes may be hiding or sunning.
- ◆ If a snake is encountered at close quarters, try to remain calm and stand still. Do not make threatening gestures toward the snake. Move backward slowly.
- ◆ Do not pick up a "dead" snake; it may only be injured, stunned or playing dead. Even a recently killed snake can bite by reflex action.
- ◆ **ONLY IF NECESSARY**, use a stick or shovel and place dead snake in a hard-sided container. Never handle the head if transporting a dead snake that needs to be identified.



Rattlesnakes are found in the southern provinces of Canada, throughout the continental United States, except for Delaware and Maine, and in all of the Mexican Provinces in different habitats from sea level to 14,000 feet.