

Living with Snakes in Tennessee

Tennessee is home to 32 species of snakes, only 4 of which are venomous. All of the venomous snakes native to Tennessee belong to the family of snakes called pit vipers. Pit vipers are the group of venomous snakes having a specialized, heat sensing pit on the front of the head. There are four species of pit vipers in Tennessee: Copperhead, Cottonmouth, Timber Rattlesnake and Pigmy Rattlesnake.

Is It Venomous or Nonvenomous?



Copperhead



Juvenile Western Cottonmouth

Venomous: vertical, elliptical pupil, facial pit between eye and nostril; & in comparison to other snakes they are very stout or thick-bodied, consequently they are poor climbers.

Tennessee's venomous snakes have a head that is offset from the rest of the body. In many nonvenomous species, it is hard to tell where the neck ends and the head begins; however many nonvenomous species may flatten their heads into the arrowhead shape when they feel threatened.

Rattlesnakes: Both of Tennessee's rattlesnakes have a rattle on the end of the tail that they will often use to warn other animals away. The rattle is used purely as a defense mechanism, but may not be used if the animal is suddenly surprised and must immediately defend itself.

Note: Many nonvenomous snakes will mimic venomous species when confronted. Mimicry may include the rapid vibration of tails (rattler-like), spreading the jaws to appear venomous, coloration and patterns that closely mimic venomous species, using an s-shaped strike stance, and rearing up and hissing loudly.

For more information on Tennessee snakes please visit the web site: [***Snakes of Tennessee***](#)



Common Watersnake



Gray Ratsnake

Nonvenomous – round pupil, no facial pits

Tip: If you find snake or lizard eggs in Tennessee, they are nonvenomous since all of our venomous snakes give live birth, as do a few nonvenomous species.

Here are some tips to help you avoid snakebite:

- ✓ **Stay on the trail.** Watch where you step, stay on paths or in clearings and avoid tall, grassy areas with heavy underbrush. Develop the habit of watching where you place your feet and hands.
- ✓ **Do not try to catch, handle, or kill snakes.** Stay at least a body length away from a snake unless you are certain it is nonvenomous.
- ✓ **Wear loose fitting clothes and leather boots when exploring outdoors.** Leather boots provide protection for the feet and ankles. Low cut shoes or sandals should never be worn in snake country, especially at night.
- ✓ **Do not jump or step over logs, rocks, or shrubs.** Walk around them instead. Be very careful when turning over logs, rocks or other large objects as a snake may be underneath.

In Tennessee it is illegal to harm, kill, remove from the wild, or possess native snakes taken from the wild without the proper permits. Please help the TWRA protect our native snakes.

