

VENOMOUS SNAKES of TEXAS



1. Prairie Rattlesnake *Crotalus viridis viridis*
2. Blacktail Rattlesnake *Crotalus molossus*
3. Massasauga *Sistrurus catenatus*
4. Timber Rattlesnake *Crotalus horridus*
5. Mojave Rattlesnake *Crotalus scutulatus*
6. Cottonmouth *Agkistrodon piscivorus*
7. Copperhead *Agkistrodon contortrix*
8. Pygmy Rattlesnake *Sistrurus miliarius streckeri*
9. Rock Rattlesnake *Crotalus lepidus*
10. Western Diamondback Rattlesnake *Crotalus atrox*
11. Texas Coral Snake *Micrurus tener tener*

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Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Wildlife Diversity Branch

VENOMOUS SNAKES OF TEXAS

Snakes play a vital role in our environment. While the bite from these snakes can be lethal, death due to snakebite in Texas is very rare today. The value received from these snakes through their control of rodent and pest populations, and through the resulting control of some diseases far outweighs the threat their presence might present in most cases.

Snakes should not be wantonly destroyed any more than any other animal or plant should be treated this way. Most snakes will avoid interaction with people wherever possible. If you discover a snake, please consider its value before destroying it.

Copperhead *Agkistrodon contortrix*

Adult males typically 1.5 - 2 feet long. Females somewhat smaller. Record length 4 feet, 4 inches.

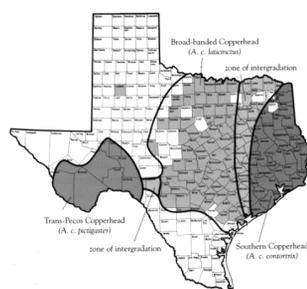
Habitat

Wooded habitats from hardwood bottomlands in East Texas to isolated woody patches in the Trans-Pecos region. Can be found in open areas that are not too remote from wooded habitats. In drier habitats they are limited to watercourses and similar corridors.

Behavior

Relatively shy and inoffensive unless provoked or otherwise disturbed. They do occasionally climb but spend most of their time on the ground. They can swim but are rarely found in the water.

May be active throughout the year under the right conditions. In spring and fall they are generally active during the day, and switch to night activity during the summer.



Cottonmouth *Agkistrodon piscivorus*

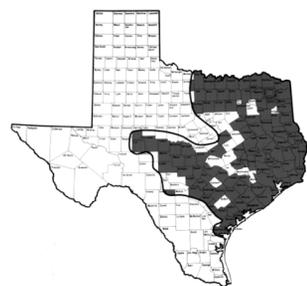
Adult males usually 20 to 30 inches. Females typically smaller. Record length 5 feet, 2 inches.

Habitat

A wide variety of aquatic and semi-aquatic habitat; most abundant where prey is plentiful and temperatures not too extreme. They require abundant basking sites and do well in urban areas. They often travel far from water to hibernate.

Behavior

Reputed to be aggressive, their disposition is often shy unless provoked. Good swimmers, they are sluggish on land. They spend a lot of time coiled at the edge of bodies of water or draped loosely in overhanging vegetation. When found away from their escape route, they will often coil their body and open their mouth in a wide gape; displaying their white lining of the mouth – thus the common name.



Western Diamondback Rattlesnake *Crotalus atrox*

Adults typically 2.5 to 4.5 feet. Males average 10 percent larger than females. Record length 7 feet, 8 inches.

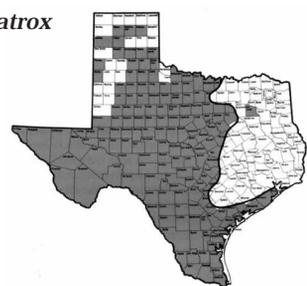
Habitat

Virtually every dry land area within its range, though it prefers the area be neither too closed nor too open. Uncommon in dense woodland or short-grass prairie, but abundant in rocky canyons and creosote deserts.

Behavior

Active all year in southern Texas. In northern climates they may be active around their dens on warm winter days. Active during the summer at night. As the days shorten, they tend to be more active during daylight hours.

When disturbed, these snakes are quick to adopt a defensive position, body curled in an “s” from which they can quickly strike. The rattle is shaken vigorously and the tongue darts in and out of the mouth. This is a purely defensive posture, and if the threat does not escalate, the snake will usually move away.



Timber Rattlesnake *Crotalus horridus*

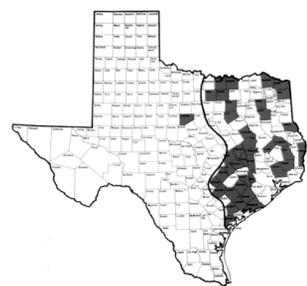
Adult males average 4 feet, 3 inches. Females usually smaller. Record length 6 feet, 3 inches.

Habitat

Forested areas of central and eastern Texas including Cross-Timbers, bottomland hardwoods and pine woodlands. A threatened species, these snakes prefer 50 percent or more closed canopies and thick ground cover. Pregnant females will spend more time basking in open habitats. Water is not a barrier for this snake.

Behavior

This mild-tempered species tends to rely primarily on camouflage as its main defensive strategy.



Rock Rattlesnake *Crotalus lepidus*

Adult males average 15 to 20 inches. Females somewhat smaller. Record length 2 feet, 9 inches.

Habitat

Rough terrain including rocky canyons, boulder fields and talus slopes between 1,155 feet and 8,580 feet above sea level. Vegetation types typically range from xeric desert communities to juniper, pinyon and oak communities.

Behavior

This shy, secretive, well-camouflaged and rarely seen snake will bite readily if disturbed. They tend to spend their active time hidden in cracks and crevices, under rocks and sheltered by vegetation.



Blacktail Rattlesnake *Crotalus molossus*

Adults average 2.5 to 3 feet. Record length 4 feet, 4 inches.

Habitat

Rocky roughland habitats throughout its range. Seemingly confined to narrow, well-vegetated canyons, sinkholes and similar features on the Edwards Plateau. Found in all suitable habitats of West Texas but most common in foothills and outwashes at canyon mouths. Preferred vegetation includes bunchgrasses, ocotillo, yucca and acacia at 4,100 feet, and pine-oak woodlands at about 8,500 feet.



Mojave Rattlesnake *Crotalus scutulatus*

Average 2 to 3 feet. Record length 4 feet, 6 inches.

Habitat

Generally found below 5,000 feet, this species occurs in open creosote bush desert flats and desert grasslands. It seems to prefer areas without rocky soils.

Behavior

Almost always nocturnal in the summer, it can be found during the day at other times, March through October. It is reputed to be highly aggressive, which, combined with the increased toxicity of its venom, places this snake at the high end of the danger scale. Individual snakes are just as likely to attempt escape as they are to strike or assume the characteristic defensive posture.



Prairie Rattlesnake *Crotalus viridis viridis*

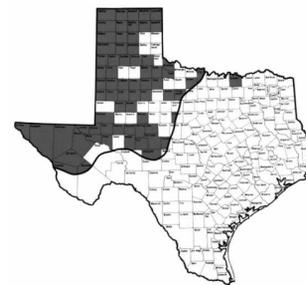
Average 2 feet, 8 inches to 3 feet, 10 inches. Record length 4 feet, 11.75 inches.

Habitat

Occurring throughout the grasslands of its range, this snake is often associated with prairie dog towns where food and burrows are readily available. It is less common in escarpment breaks, flood plains or desert scrub habitats.

Behavior

This snake's behavior is variable, with some individuals striking readily while others attempt to escape.



Massasauga *Sistrurus catenatus*

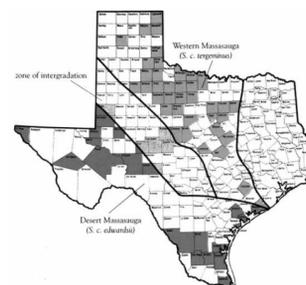
Average 18 to 26 inches. Record length 35 inches.

Habitat

Characteristic inhabitant of tall-grass prairies of Central Texas as well as short-grass prairies and open thornscrub. Seasonal wetlands seem to be an important feature, with the snakes hibernating in wetter areas and moving to drier, upland habitats during the summer.

Behavior

These snakes tend to be variable in their reaction to threats – some flee readily while others will adopt a defensive position and/or strike.



Pygmy Rattlesnake *Sistrurus miliarius streckeri*

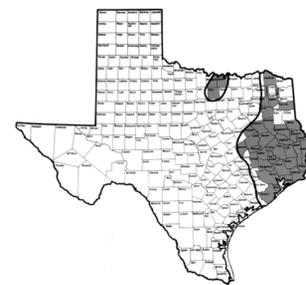
Average 1–1.5 feet. Record length 2 feet, 1 inch.

Habitat

Found under decaying logs, pieces of bark and other organic material in the open loblolly pine/hardwood forests, bottomland hardwoods, mesic grasslands of East Texas and open agricultural lands and bar ditches along the upper Coastal Plains.

Behavior

The very cryptic coloration allows this snake to spend most of its time hidden. The tiny rattle is often barely audible or mistaken for a cicada or other insect. When disturbed, snakes have been known to bob their heads vertically in addition to rattling.



Texas Coral Snake *Micrurus tener tener*

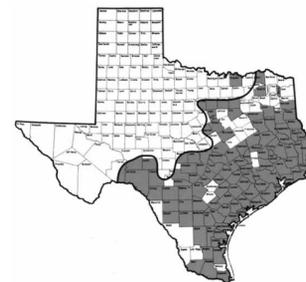
Average 15 to 25 inches. Record 3 feet, 11.75 inches. This snake is best remembered by the rhyme “Red touch black, venom lack; red touch yellow, kill a fellow.”

Habitat

A wide variety of urban, suburban and other habitats including Texas pine forests and oak-juniper canyons on the Pecos River, provided that sufficient rock-crevice cover or plant litter exists.

Behavior

These snakes will attempt to escape if discovered, and individuals will engage in complex defensive displays if prevented from escaping. They may coil, hiding their head beneath the coils and mimicking the head with their tails. They may also engage in erratic body movements and feign death. Some individuals will be very temperamental and bite if restrained in any way.



First Aid Tips:

- Assume envenomation. Coral snake bite symptoms may include tremors, slurred speech, blurred or double vision, drowsiness or euphoria, and increased salivation. The onset of symptoms from a Coral snake bite may be delayed by as much as 12 hours. Pit viper bites (all the other venomous snakes in Texas) can produce burning pain, progressive local swelling and discoloration of the skin.
- Identify the snake that inflicted the bite if possible. Do this carefully so you do not end up with more than one bite or more than one victim.
- Keep the victim calm. Remain calm and confident yourself. Remember, people rarely die from snakebite.
- Be alert for signs of shock. Treat appropriately.
- Wash the bite area with a disinfectant if possible.
- Remove any constricting clothing or jewelry that may cut circulation as swelling increases.
- Prevent movement of the bitten area. Splint as necessary. Position the bitten limb at the level of the heart.
- Get medical treatment as soon as possible.

DO NOT:

- Make incisions between the bite marks
- Use a tourniquet
- Use ice
- Use electroshock treatments
- Give alcohol, aspirin or other drugs
- Attempt to suck out the venom
- Administer antivenin unless properly trained



To learn more about venomous snakes, purchase *Poisonous Snakes of Texas* by calling (800) 252-3206.

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