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The Snakes Are Out!
Information and Facts

Facts About Washington Snakes

Snakes are among the most misunderstood of all animals. As a result, many harmless, beneficial snakes have met untimely deaths at the hands of shovel-wielding humans. Of the dozen or so species of snakes found in Washington, only the Western rattlesnake is capable of inflicting a venomous bite, which it seldom does.

Snakes should be left alone, and except for a rattlesnake that poses an immediate danger to people or pets, no snake should ever be killed. Observe snakes, like all wild animals, from a respectful distance. Don't attempt to capture them, and don't keep wild ones as pets.

All snakes are an important part of the natural food chain, eating a variety of prey – from mice and birds to frogs and insects. Besides their ecological value, snakes offer the careful wildlife viewer a chance to watch one of nature's most efficient predators.

Rattlesnakes

If you live in or visit rattlesnake country, be alert and aware of this species in order to avoid threatening it. Also know the recommended treatment steps in case a human or pet is bitten. If you encounter a rattlesnake, move away: A rattlesnake will coil into a defensive posture if it cannot escape by crawling away. If you remain too close, the rattlesnake will usually warn you with its distinctive rattle. Its last defensive move is to strike. Remember, all of these warnings are meant to help avoid conflict. Rattlesnakes want to avoid you as much as you want to avoid them.

Prevent Problems While Hiking

To minimize conflicts with rattlesnakes while hiking:

- ❗ Stick to well-used, open trails. In brushy areas, use a walking stick to alert a snake of your approach.
- ❗ Avoid walking through thick brush and willow thickets.
- ❗ Do not step or put your hands where you cannot see.
- ❗ Wear over-the-ankle boots and loose-fitting long pants.
- ❗ Watch rattlesnakes from a distance, and be aware of defensive behaviors that let you know you are too close.



Rattlesnake Bites

All rattlesnake bites should be considered life threatening. When someone has been bitten, time is of the essence. If possible, call ahead to the emergency room so anti-venom can be ready when the victim arrives.

If a rattlesnake bites a person or a pet, do the following:

- ❗ Keep the victim calm, restrict movement, and keep the affected area below the heart level to reduce flow of venom toward the heart.
- ❗ Wash the bite area with soap and water.
- ❗ Remove any rings or constricting items; the affected area will swell.
- ❗ Cover the bite with a clean, moist dressing to reduce swelling and discomfort.
- ❗ Shock is responsible for more snakebite deaths than the actual venom is. To treat for shock, keep the victim quiet and maintain his or her body temperature. If the victim is cold, wrap them in a blanket; if hot, cool them off by fanning.
- ❗ Get medical help immediately. Make sure the doctor who treats the victim knows how to treat snakebites and if not, call the Poison Center at (800) 222-1222.

Things not to do:

- ❗ Do not allow the person to engage in physical activity such as walking or running. Carry the victim if they need to be moved.
- ❗ Do not cut or suck the wound; do not apply ice or cold packs to the wound and never use a tourniquet.
- ❗ Do not give the victim stimulants or pain medications, unless instructed by a physician.
- ❗ Do not give the victim anything by mouth.
- ❗ Do not raise the bite area above the level of the victim's heart.

More information regarding Snakes and Living with Wildlife can be found at: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wlm/living.htm>