

RATTLESNAKE CONSERVATION

Rattlesnake populations are in decline due to persecution by humans, habitat destruction and fragmentation, and an emerging disease known as snake fungal disease (SFD). SFD has been detected in West Virginia, and biologists are now focusing conservation and monitoring efforts to understand the distribution of the disease, and reduce its spread and impact to West Virginia's snakes.

You can help the WVDNR conserve and protect rattlesnakes by:

- Educating others about the importance of rattlesnakes and other snake species.
- Leaving rattlesnakes alone instead of killing them.
- Reporting sightings of snakes with visible swelling, crusty scabs or open wounds on the skin.
- Reporting poaching or other wildlife violations to WVDNR Law Enforcement.

Things to remember

- Rattlesnakes are an important part of healthy forest ecosystems.
- Take or possession of snakes is prohibited. It's illegal to kill a snake in West Virginia unless it's in your home.
- Proper lawn care and pest control can reduce human-rattlesnake conflict.
- **Do not handle rattlesnakes.**
- A gentle stream of water released from a garden hose can be used to encourage rattlesnakes to move on.
- Rattlesnakes on roadways can be gently coaxed out of the way using a long pole or stick.
- Rattlesnakes are not aggressive and will not chase people or bite unprovoked.

Find out more about West Virginia's snakes, as well as amphibian and reptile regulations at go to WVdnr.gov/herpregs.



Common Myths

Rattlesnakes will chase people and pets

Rattlesnakes see humans as predators and will defend themselves by shaking their rattler, hissing and even biting if provoked. However, they are quite docile and not aggressive. They will not give chase.

Rattlesnakes can spit venom

Rattlesnakes cannot spit their venom, and are only capable of striking out half of their body length.

Rattlesnakes can hybridize with other snakes

Animals can only hybridize with species that are closely related taxonomically. Rattlesnakes in West Virginia are not taxonomically similar enough to hybridize with any other snake species in the state.



If bitten by a rattlesnake, suck out the venom

If a person is bitten by a rattlesnake, do not attempt to suck out the venom. This method does not work, and can increase tissue damage around the bite. If bitten by a rattlesnake, seek medical attention immediately!

District Offices

Main Office

324 Fourth Avenue
S. Charleston, WV 25303
304-558-6200
Law Enforcement:
304-558-2784

District 1

P.O. Box 99
1110 Railroad Street
Farmington, WV 26571
304-825-6787

District 2

1 Depot Street
Romney, WV 26757
304-822-3551

District 3

163 Wildlife Road
French Creek, WV 26218
304-924-6211

District 4

2006 Robert C. Byrd Drive
Beckley, WV 25801
304-256-6947

District 5

480 Forks of Coal Way
Alum Creek, WV 25003
304-756-1023

District 6

2311 Ohio Avenue
Parkersburg, WV 26101
304-420-4550

Operations Center

738 Ward Road
Elkins, WV 26241
304-637-0245



West Virginia Division of Natural Resources
324 Fourth Ave. • South Charleston, WV 25303

304-558-2758

WVdnr.gov



It is the policy of the Division of Natural Resources to provide its facilities, services and programs to all persons without regard to sex, race, age, religion, national origin or ancestry, disability or other protected group status. 10M 10/21

WEST VIRGINIA LIVING WITH RATTLESNAKES



WEST VIRGINIA
DNR
WVdnr.gov

LIVING WITH RATTLESNAKES

West Virginia is home to one species of rattlesnake: the timber rattlesnake. This venomous pit viper became West Virginia’s state reptile in 2008. While the timber rattlesnake can be dangerous when provoked, it is one of West Virginia’s most misunderstood and persecuted animals.

Timber rattlesnakes provide ecological benefits and function as top predators in forest ecosystems. They help control small mammal populations, such as mice and chipmunks, capable of transmitting diseases like Lyme disease and Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome.

Rattlesnakes can grow up to five feet and occur in a variety of colors and patterns. Female rattlesnakes reach sexual maturity between the ages of 7 and 11, and breed once every three to four years. Breeding takes place between July and early September, before rattlesnakes enter their winter dens. Females do not lay eggs, but give birth to fully developed young, from late summer to mid-autumn of the following year.



Paula Waggy

A timber rattlesnake can be identified by the rattle at the end of its tail and its dark brown (above) or black (right) crossbands.

In your yard

Rattlesnakes are venomous and can pose a threat to humans and pets. If you encounter a rattlesnake, it is best to give it space and leave it alone. Human dwellings are not ideal habitats for rattlesnakes, and they will eventually relocate.

Do not handle rattlesnakes! If you need to move a snake from your property, contact a wildlife control agent, or you can use a long pole and gently touch the snake’s tail. You also can use a garden hose and release a gentle stream of water to encourage the snake to move on while also maintaining a safe distance. Killing a rattlesnake in your yard is illegal and dangerous. It places you in close proximity with a rattlesnake and increases the risk of being bitten.

Chemical repellents are not effective at deterring rattlesnakes and can be hazardous to the environment. The best way to reduce rattlesnake encounters around your home is to remove thick vegetation and debris, and control rodent populations in outbuildings.

On the road

Rattlesnakes encountered on the road should be allowed to cross to a safe location, or gently coaxed off the road by gently touching their tail with a long pole. Intentionally hitting snakes that are crossing the road is not only cruel, but can have major impacts on local snake populations.



Jamie Fenske



Jared Cain

Like most venomous snakes, the timber rattlesnake has vertical pupil slits. Non-venomous snakes usually have rounded pupils.

What if I’m bitten by a rattlesnake?

If bitten by a rattlesnake, **seek medical help immediately**. Do not attempt to suck out venom or apply a tourniquet. Remove all restrictive items, such as rings, watches and jewelry, and contact a medical responder immediately. You may need to apply a splint to the bite area and calmly walk to the nearest vehicle. If possible, lie down once in the vehicle and keep the bite area beneath the heart. Remain calm and refrain from using tobacco, alcohol, aspirin or caffeine as these items will increase the spread of venom in the body.

Regulations

The WVDNR has established regulations to protect amphibian and reptile populations, including:

- It is unlawful to take or possess a rattlesnake in West Virginia.
- It is unlawful to take or possess snakes in West Virginia.
- Amphibians and reptiles may not be collected from the wild for commercial purposes.
- Except as provided for in West Virginia Code 20-2-11 or CSR 58-73, it is unlawful to possess, expose for sale, buy, sell, trade or barter for native reptile and amphibian species in West Virginia.

For complete regulations, go to WVdnr.gov/herpregs.