VENOMOUS SNAKES OF GEORGIA

**Species Distribution:**

- American Copperhead (Agkistrodon contortrix)
- Timber Rattlesnake (Crotalus durissus)
- Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake (Crotalus adamanteus)
- Eastern Cottonmouth (Agkistrodon piscivorus)
- Pigmy Rattlesnake (Sistrurus catenatus)
- Western Diamondback Rattlesnake (Crotalus atrox)

**Cautions:**

1. Stay Calm
2. Try to Identify
3. Keep the Affected Part Immobilized
4. Keep the Patient with the Affected Side Down
5. Get the Species Information

**Poison Control:**

- Non-Venomous Snakes: Call 911 or the Georgia Poison Center (1-800-222-1222).
- Venomous Snakes: Follow the above steps and then contact the Georgia Poison Center.

**Management:**

- Non-Venomous Snakes: It is illegal to disturb or destroy the dens, holes, or homes of wildlife or use explosives, chemicals, or other devices to drive wildlife, including venomous snakes, from those homes (a misdemeanor, punishable by up to a $1,000 fine and a year in jail).
- Venomous Snakes: It is illegal to sell, possess, or transport venomous snakes (O.C.G.A. §27-1-30).

**Additional Information:**

- The information in this brochure is intended to aid in identifying the venomous snake species found in Georgia through the recognition of physical traits, pattern, and color.
- Caution should be used when approaching any snake, and snakes found in the wild should only be handled by experienced individuals.
- Venomous and non-venomous snakes serve invaluable roles in the environment and should be respected and protected.

**Important Notes:**

- According to the American Association of Poison Control Centers, only 20 venomous snake bites were reported nationwide during the same period were fatal, an average of two fatalities a year.
- Bites from non-venomous snakes are relatively uncommon, and according to the National Weather Association, only 20 venomous snake bites were reported nationwide during the same period were fatal, an average of two fatalities a year.
There are 46 species of snakes known in Georgia, with only six species being venomous: Copperhead (Agkistrodon contortrix), Cottonmouth (Agkistrodon piscivorus), Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake (Crotalus adamanteus), Timber/Canebrake Rattlesnake (Crotalus horridus), Pigmy Rattlesnake (Sistrurus miliaris) and Eastern Coral Snake (Micrurus fulvius). No single venomous snake species is found over the entire state, and only a portion of the Georgia Coastal Plain is inhabited by all six venomous species. Although differentiating among all 46 species can be difficult, becoming familiar with the colors and patterns of Georgia’s six venomous snake species will enable you to determine whether any snake encountered is venomous or non-venomous.

The information in this brochure is intended to aid in identifying the venomous snake species found in Georgia through the recognition of physical traits, pattern and color. Caution should be used when approaching any snake, and snakes found in the wild should only be handled by experienced people after proper identification. Although the possibility of incurring a venomous snake bite should be taken seriously, only the Timber Rattlesnake, Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake and Cottonmouth realistically represent a serious threat to human life. That risk is remote when compared to other environmental hazards, such as lightning. According to the National Weather Service, 372 deaths due to lightning were recorded in the United States from 2002-2011, or an average of 37 deaths annually. According to the American Association of Poison Control Centers, only 20 venomous snake bites reported nationwide during the same period were fatal, an average of two fatalities a year.

Despite the relatively low level of danger posed by venomous snakes, many people consider their fear, no matter how irrational, justification for killing any snake. Venomous and non-venomous snakes serve invaluable roles in the natural environment as predator and prey. In Georgia, it is illegal (a misdemeanor, punishable by up to a $1,000 fine and a year in jail) to possess or kill many of the state’s nongame wildlife species, including non-venomous snakes (O.C.G.A. §27-1-28). It is also illegal to disturb or destroy the dens, holes or homes of wildlife or use explosives, chemicals or other devices to drive wildlife, including venomous snakes, from those homes (O.C.G.A. §27-1-30).
Quick Reference Guide

VENOMOUS Snakes of Georgia

1. Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake
2. Cottonmouth (Mississippi Water Moccasin)
3. Timber Rattlesnake
4. Copperhead
5. Blacksnake

Quick Reference Guide to Georgia’s Non-venomous Snakes

1. Eastern Milksnake
2. Eastern Garter Snake
3. Eastern Ribbon Snake
4. Striped Crayfish Snake
5. Watersnake
6. Florida Pinesnake
7. Florida Brown Snake
8. Eastern Kingsnake
9. Corn Snake
10. Florida Pine Snake
11. Southwestern Watersnake
12. Red-Bellied Snake
13. Common Garter Snake
14. Eastern Ribbonsnake

*Federally Protected                *State-protected             *Species of Conservation Concern

Species range on opposite facing page. Certain species of non-venomous snakes (e.g., water moccasins) are excluded and people using this brochure should be cautious when approaching any snake that they have not been identified.

For additional information, please contact:
WILDLIFE RESOURCES DIVISION
GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
114 Ruth Crop Drive, Forest Park, GA 30297
478-994-1439
www.georgiawildlife.com

Distribution of Venomous Snakes in Georgia

- Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake
- Cottonmouth (Mississippi Water Moccasin)
- Timber Rattlesnake

- Copperhead
- Blacksnake

- Eastern Milksnake
- Eastern Garter Snake
- Eastern Ribbon Snake
- Striped Crayfish Snake
- Watersnake
- Florida Pinesnake
- Florida Brown Snake
- Eastern Kingsnake
- Corn Snake

No single venomous snake species found in Georgia through the recognition of physical traits, pattern and color. Caution should be used when approaching any snake. Venomous and non-venomous snakes serve invaluable roles in the natural environment as predator and prey. In Georgia, it is illegal to possess or kill many of the state’s nongame wildlife species, including certain species of snakes.

Stay Calm: Get emergency medical help immediately or call 911. Do not move the person, stay with them, and try to keep warm until help arrives.

Do not give the patient food, drink, or medication (e.g., pain killers), and do not apply a tourniquet.

Keep the affected limb at or below the level of the heart, do not pack the wound with ice or snow, and keep the patient calm and immobilize any displaced bone. Move the injured person to the nearest hospital. Get the species distribution, range maps and species information from the website www.georgiawildlife.com.

Although the probability of encountering a venomous snake is low, bites can occur unexpectedly, often resulting in severe pain or death. Therefore, venomous snakes should be washed with warm soapy water; a tetanus shot or booster should be given. The site should be cleaned with a saline solution. The patient should be kept calm and the wound should be dressed to prevent further contamination or infection. Emergency medical treatment is necessary. In general, the likelihood of death from a venomous snake bite is remote; however, some bites may cause severe pain or death.

A bite from a non-venomous snake should be washed with warm soapy water and covered with a clean bandage. Emergency medical treatment is not usually required unless the bite is from a venomous snake or is caused by a fungal infection or other disease. Do not drive wildlife including venomous snakes from their homes. Do not release non-venomous snakes back to their natural environment. Do not广告.
Major Georgia reservoirs on the edge or outside of the known range of Cottonmouths

Carters Lake
Blue Ridge Lake
Nottely Lake
Chatuge Lake
Lake Burton
Weiss Lake
Allatoona Lake
Lake Lanier
Lake Juliette
Lake Toccoa
Lake Oconee
Lake Sinclair
Lake Hartwell
Lake Russell
Clarks Hill Lake

CAUTION! Species ranges as depicted reflect current knowledge of venomous snake distribution (2016). Range margins are estimated and people using this brochure should be cautious when approaching any snake that has not been identified.
DESCRIPTION: Medium-sized snakes reaching a maximum length of about 4.5 feet, but most are less than 3 feet. The background coloration is usually light brown or gray, but individuals range from rusty orange to pinkish to nearly black. This species is easily identifiable by a pattern of 10-21 dark-brown, hourglass or saddle-shaped crossbands, which are wider at the sides of the body and become narrower along the back.

HABITAT: Occur in most forested habitats but are particularly common on rocky wooded hillsides in the mountains and swamp and river edges in the Piedmont and Coastal Plain. Habitats with abundant logs, leaf litter, and rocks for cover are favored, while open habitats such as old fields and agricultural areas are generally avoided.

NON-VENOMOUS SPECIES OFTEN CONFUSED WITH:
Gray Rat Snake; Eastern Rat Snake (yellow phase); Corn Snake; Northern, Brown and Banded Watersnakes; Eastern Hognose Snake.

STATUS: Uncommon to common. Copperheads are apparently more tolerant of urban development than many snake species. Populations often persist in suburban neighborhoods as long as some patches of forest remain.

**Copperhead, Highland Moccasin**

*Agkistrodon contortrix*

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**Adult, Long County**

**Adult, Floyd County**

**Juvenile, McIntosh County**

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**DESCRIPTION:** Medium-sized snakes reaching a maximum length of about 4.5 feet, but most are less than 3 feet. The background coloration is usually light brown or gray, but individuals range from rusty orange to pinkish to nearly black. This species is easily identifiable by a pattern of 10-21 dark-brown, hourglass or saddle-shaped crossbands, which are wider at the sides of the body and become narrower along the back.

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Gray Rat Snake; Eastern Rat Snake (yellow phase); Corn Snake; Northern, Brown and Banded Watersnakes; Eastern Hognose Snake.

**STATUS:** Uncommon to common. Copperheads are apparently more tolerant of urban development than many snake species. Populations often persist in suburban neighborhoods as long as some patches of forest remain.
**Cottonmouth, Water Moccasin**

*Agkistrodon piscivorus*

**DESCRIPTION:** Relatively large, heavy-bodied snakes reaching a maximum length of nearly 6 feet, but most are less than 3 feet, 3 inches. Although these snakes are characterized by wide, dark bands along the body on a lighter brown or olive-colored background, individual coloration varies within and among populations. As Cottonmouths mature, many become very dark, and the bands become totally obscured.

**HABITAT:** Semi-aquatic. Cottonmouths prefer swamp-like habitats and can be very abundant in these areas. Sometimes found along rivers or in more open areas such as around large lakes. Also, these snakes may move overland long distances and can sometimes be found far from any water source. They generally hibernate in dry, upland areas, often in stump holes.

**NON-VENOMOUS SPECIES OFTEN CONFUSED WITH:** Several species of the large watersnakes (genus *Nerodia*; Plain-bellied, Northern, Brown, Banded and Green) are often mistakenly referred to as Cottonmouths because of their similarity in appearance. However, the dark stripe on the side of the jaw, heat-sensing pit on the face and the behavior of gaping – a defensive posture where the snake opens its mouth wide – are distinctive to Cottonmouths.

**STATUS:** Abundant.
**Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake**

*Description:* Georgia’s heaviest-bodied and one of the state’s longest snakes, reaching or possibly exceeding 7 feet, but more typically measuring 3-5 feet in total length. The tail has 3-10 brown and white bands and a “rattle” (one or more loose rings of hard keratin) that makes a loud whirring noise when shaken. Upper surface of the body is patterned by a long row of 24-35 dark brown, diamond-like blotches, fringed by thin yellow to cream borders. These blotches are broader than long and are linked together at their tips.

**Habitat:** Eastern Diamondbacks occupy upland habitats with an open canopy, especially native longleaf pine forests on sandhills, clay hills and flatwoods. Found in numbers on barrier islands, especially within inter-dune meadows containing dense bunch grasses alternating with shrub thickets and in the dense edges of saltmarsh. Also found in mixed pine-hardwood forests that develop on abandoned agricultural sites, and in and around open woodlots, brushy pasture borders and abandoned homesites in suburban and rural areas. However, these snakes almost never enter houses.

**Status:** Rare, Georgia Species of Concern. Human impacts have caused the species to decline throughout its range. Habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation are the most serious threats to the species because its upland habitats are in high demand for agriculture, silviculture, and residential development. Unfortunately, Eastern Diamondbacks are killed by most people whenever they are encountered. The widespread practice of gassing Gopher Tortoise burrows to kill rattlesnakes or evict them for use in “rattlesnake roundups” often harms this species, and is a detriment to the large assemblage of up to 300 other animal species that use tortoise burrows.
DESCRIPTION: Large, heavy-bodied snakes reaching a maximum length of nearly 6 feet in the Coastal Plain and about 5 feet in the mountains, but most range from 3-5 feet in length. The background color ranges through various shades of pink, yellow, tan, gray, brown and olive to velvety black. A series of brown to black chevron-shaped crossbands (15-34) typically cross the body. The tail is black and tipped by a segmented rattle. Very dark or solid black individuals are common in higher mountains of the northeastern part of the state but are rare elsewhere.

HABITAT: Common in much of the heavily wooded country of the Coastal Plain, but in more open areas these snakes are primarily limited to wooded stream corridors. The range is spotty on the barrier islands and along the immediate coast. In the Piedmont, distribution is highly fragmented due to habitat loss and Timber Rattlesnakes are primarily associated with heavily wooded stream corridors and small, isolated mountains. In the Georgia mountains, the distribution is somewhat localized around suitable denning sites (including root and stump holes, mammal burrows, old home sites and debris piles, and – especially in upland regions – rock crevices).

STATUS: Common (locally abundant). Common in much of the Coastal Plain but the range is highly fragmented in the Piedmont and under increasing pressure from residential development. Timber Rattlesnakes are hunted to some extent in the mountains, where in many areas they appear to have declined in recent years.
**DESCRIPTION:** Smallest of the rattlesnakes, with the maximum total length reported of 31 inches, but pigmy rattlesnakes usually reach a size of 16-23 inches. The background color is usually gray or tan, but occasional individuals can be reddish or almost black in some populations. The pattern consists of a series of light-edged dark blotches or spots (22-45) on the back, as well as from one to three rows of dark spots on the sides. There may be a reddish stripe down the center of the back. The tail is tipped by a segmented rattle; however, the interlocking segments of the rattle are poorly notched compared to other rattlesnakes, and occasionally some individuals lack a rattle.

**HABITAT:** Found in a variety of habitats at elevations of 0-1,640 feet and ranging from dry sandhills and longleaf pine forests to wet hammocks and seasonally flooded pine flatwoods. In southern Georgia, Pigmy Rattlesnakes specifically thrive in saw palmetto thickets.

**NON-VENOMOUS SPECIES OFTEN CONFUSED WITH:** Eastern and Southern Hognose snakes.

**STATUS:** Uncommon. In some areas, population densities of these rattlesnakes are very high, while in other places Pigmy Rattlesnakes are fairly uncommon. However, this species is small and cryptic, and chances are that many individuals are overlooked.
DESCRIPTION: Fairly slender snakes reaching a maximum length of 47 inches, but most range from 20-30 inches long. The body is patterned with broad black and red rings, equal in width and separated by narrow yellow rings. The red rings are dotted with numerous black flecks that may coalesce on the back into a pair of spots. The rounded snout is black and is followed by a broad yellow band across the head and neck. The tail has three or four broad black rings and two to four narrow yellow rings.

HABITAT: Coastal Plain populations are typically associated with sandy upland habitats such as longleaf pine sandhills and pine-saw palmetto flatwoods. Live oak and other hardwood hammocks on well-drained soils may also support populations. Eastern Coral Snakes are absent from extensive wetlands and from vast tracts of pine flatwoods underlain by low, poorly-drained soils. Individuals lead highly subterranean lives and shelter in virtually any type of underground refuge, including Gopher Tortoise burrows and stump holes.

NON-VENOMOUS SPECIES OFTEN CONFUSED WITH: The Scarlet Kingsnake also has a color pattern of contrasting red, black and yellow or white rings but has a red snout, and the light-colored rings are separated from the red ones by black. The Scarlet Snake has a red, pointed snout; red back blotches that are outlined by black; and a white, unmarked belly. A helpful rhyme to distinguish Eastern Coral Snakes goes, “Red touch yellow, deadly fellow; red touch black, venom lack.”

STATUS: Rare, Georgia Species of Concern. This species is generally distributed and seemingly fairly common in the lower and middle Coastal Plain of southeastern Georgia. Its status in the Piedmont, upper Coastal Plain and in the southwestern portion of the state is poorly known.

Eastern Coral Snake
Micrurus fulvius

Predicated Species Range
Documented County Occurrence
Outside of Species Distribution
For additional information, please contact:

GEORGIA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
WILDLIFE RESOURCES DIVISION
NONGAME CONSERVATION SECTION
116 Rum Creek Drive; Forsyth GA 31029
478-994-1438
www.georgiawildlife.com

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1. **STAY CALM.** Get the patient to the nearest hospital right away! Call 911 or the Georgia Poison Center (1-800-222-1222) immediately.

2. **TRY TO IDENTIFY THE SNAKE BY SIGHT ONLY.** Look for color, patterns and head shape.

3. **DO NOT TRY TO KILL THE SNAKE;** it could bite again.

4. **KEEP THE PATIENT CALM AND IMMOBILE** (preferably lying down).

5. **KEEP THE AFFECTED LIMB AT AN EVEN LEVEL** with the rest of the body.

6. **DO NOT GIVE THE PATIENT FOOD, DRINK, OR MEDICATION** (e.g., pain medications, alcohol, etc.).

7. **DO NOT USE A Tourniquet.**

8. **DO NOT CUT THE WOUND.**

9. **DO NOT TRY TO SUCK OUT THE VENOM.**

10. **DO NOT PACK THE WOUND IN ICE.**

Bites from non-venomous snakes serve invaluable roles in the environment, such as lightning. According to the National Weather Service, 372 deaths due to lightning were recorded in the United States from environmental hazards, such as lightning. The risk is remote when compared to other serious threats to human life. A venomous snake bite should be taken seriously, only the timber rattlesnake, and snakes found in the wild should only be handled by experienced | people after proper identification. Although the possibility of incurring a bite may be needed. Bites from non-venomous | species are venomous: Copperhead (\(Crotalus adamanteus\)), timber/Canebrake rattlesnake (\(Sistrurus mordax\)), eastern Diamondback rattlesnake (\(Crotalus horridus\)), eastern Milk Snake (\(Lampropeltis triangulum\)), Eastern Indigo Snake (\(Drymarchon couperi\)), Brown Watersnake (\(Sistrurus dekayi\)), Yellow Rat Snake (\(Elaphe climacophora\)), and Cottonmouth (\(Agkistrodon piscivorus\)).

Despite the relatively low level of danger posed by venomous snakes, many people consider their fear, no matter how irrational, justification for killing species distribution, range maps and species information are attributed to the Georgia Herp Atlas Project and Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

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