



## RATTLESNAKES: A Guide for Living with Wildlife in San Diego County

### General Information

Southern California is a beautiful place to live. It is the home of great weather, natural beauty, stunning plants, amazing animals, and several species of rattlesnakes!

These include the Western Diamondback, Red Diamond, Southern Pacific, Speckled, and Sidewinder. The different species of rattlesnakes can be found in every habitat in San Diego County, from the coast to the deserts.

The simplest way to identify a rattlesnake is by seeing or hearing the traditional rattle hiss or buzz. Rattlesnakes can lose their rattles, however, so don't rely on seeing rattles for identification! All rattlesnakes have a wide, triangular head, much wider at the back than the front, and a distinct, thin "neck" region, and long pointed tails (see diagrams and photos on the right side of this page for examples).

Rattlesnakes come in a variety of colors such as brown, tan, yellow, green, gray, black, chalky white and dull red. Many have the characteristic diamond, chevron or blotched markings on their backs or sides.

Rattlesnakes usually hibernate during the fall and winter only to awaken in the spring months (usually March and April). They can be found, however, at any time of the year depending upon the weather.

Overgrown foliage is the perfect place for any snake to hide so the winter months are a great time to trim back wild brush and be extra careful while planting those spring bulbs in the garden.

Rattlesnakes are ectothermic (cold-blooded) and have no control system for their body temperature so they must stay underground in burrows, under rocks or in the shade to escape the hottest parts of the day. But when there are mild days, rattlesnakes, will "sunbathe" or bask coiled on rocks soaking in the sunrays or they will hunt for food.

### Food & Habitat



Rattlesnakes fulfill a vital ecological role. Rattlesnakes primarily eat rodents, but they will also eat rabbits, gophers, squirrels, chipmunks, birds, and lizards. A rattlesnake can eat 25% of the rodents in a given area each year. In turn, rattlesnakes provide food for raptors and even other snakes.

### How to Avoid Rattlesnakes & Rattlesnake Bites

Around the house, the easiest way to deter rattlesnakes is to remove their food source, namely rodents. You should also seal any gaps under doors to prevent any unwelcome visitors.

If a rattlesnake senses your approach and has an avenue of escape, it will leave the area, probably before you even see it. Startling a snake is the way that most people get bitten.

If the snake cannot escape, it will flatten its body and head, and rattle its tail to give you a warning. Should you encounter a rattlesnake, or hear its warning rattle, stand still until you have located the snake, then walk away from it calmly. Yelling at the snake certainly will not work, as rattlesnakes are deaf. Rattlesnakes cannot crawl as fast as you can walk, and you should have no problem leaving the area. Rattlesnakes can strike in a split second though snakebites are defensive reactions and are not meant to be an act of aggression.

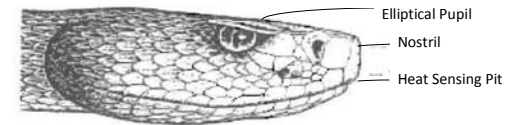


Rattlesnakes can strike one-third to one-half their own length

### The following tips can help you and your pets avoid snakes:

- Wear Hiking boots.
- Stay on paths and trails. Avoid tall grass, weeds, and brush where snakes may hide.
- Keep your dog on leash while hiking.
- Look for concealed snakes before picking up rocks, sticks or wood.
- Consider using a walking stick when hiking. If you encounter a snake, it may strike the stick instead of you or your pet.
- Give rattlesnakes the right-of-way.
- If you live in an area where rattlesnakes have been found, check your yard before letting your pets and children out to play.

### Head Shapes Rattlesnakes vs. Non-Venomous Snakes

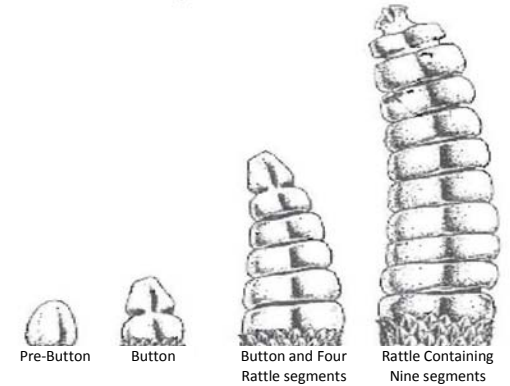


(VENOMOUS) Profile of typical crotalid Rattlesnake showing scale formation and head configuration.

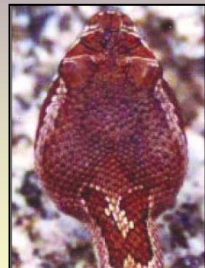


(NON-VENOMOUS) Profile of typical colubrid snake showing scale formation and head configuration.

### Rattle Formation From pre-button to adult



The head and neck of the non-venomous gopher snake are nearly the same width.



Bulges at the base of a rattlesnake's head hold venom glands, forming a triangular shape.

### Contact Us

☎ 619-767-2675

☎ 24-hour Emergency: 619-236-2341

🌐 [www.sddac.com](http://www.sddac.com)

### Shelter Hours & Locations

Tuesday through Saturday, 9:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.  
(Closed Sundays, Mondays, and County Holidays)

◆ 5480 Gaines Street, San Diego, CA 92110

◆ 5821 Sweetwater Road, Bonita, CA 91902

◆ 2481 Palomar Airport Road, Carlsbad, CA 92011



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