

## THE BITE

Rattlesnakes are members of the pit viper family. They have heat sensors, or pits, on each side of their head below the nostrils that detect infrared. These sensors allow the snake to find its warm blooded prey. The rattlesnake can also follow the trail of its prey by flicking its tongue along the ground. The rattlesnake uses this hunting technique as well as ambushing its prey. When it is within striking distance, which is 1/3 to 1/2 of its body length, it quickly lunges forward and aims for the prey. While in the forward motion, the snake's jaws will open, extending the two top front fangs that are tucked



backwards under its upper jaw. These fangs act as hypodermic needles and inject the venom directly into the snake's target. The venom not only subdues the prey, but also begins breaking down the tissue of the prey to make it easier to digest. Usually it is a strike and release, however in some cases the snake will hang on to the victim until the struggling ceases.

One important note to remember is that one should never handle a dead rattlesnake. Although dead, the snake could still have a jerk reaction and bite you. If you kill a rattlesnake for food, be certain to remove the head first and bury it.

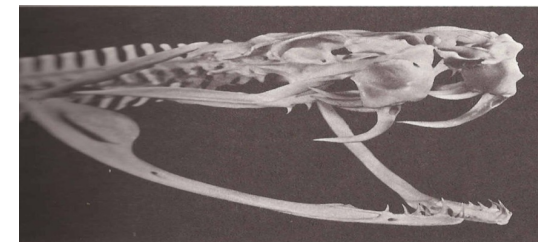
## GENERAL INFORMATION

The heads of rattlesnakes found in California are different from other snake species. Most snake species have heads that are the same width as their bodies. However, our rattlesnakes have bulges at the base of their head, giving them a triangular shape. These bulges are where the venom sacks are located. Rattlesnakes are very thick and heavy bodied which makes their tracks easy to distinguish in dirt. They move very slowly with their rattles held up off the ground.

During days of extreme heat, rattlesnakes will seek shelter in the shade, venturing out in the cooler evenings to hunt for food.

Even though it is a dangerous animal, rattlesnakes are not without predators of their own. Raptors consider them fair game and, after killing them with piercing talons, will eat rattlesnakes. Roadrunners also feed on rattlesnakes and will beat them to death with their strong beaks. Opossums are immune to the rattlesnake venom and can help keep them out of your yard. King snakes will imitate a rattlesnake to scare humans away, which usually ends in the snake's death. However, king snakes will often make a meal out of a rattlesnake!

Rattlesnakes will hibernate during cold weather, emerging in the Spring to hunt for food. This is also when you'll see more babies, which are born live in late Fall or early Spring.



## AVOID THE BITE!

Rattlesnakes are not out to get you. Their venom is strictly designed for subduing prey and for protection, and they don't want to waste it on humans. By following a few simple rules you can avoid a painful incident.

- Use trails that are cleared enough to allow complete visibility.
- Don't allow children and pets to run ahead of you.
- Do not reach under rocks; be aware of where you put your hands and feet.
- Check the area thoroughly before setting up camp or staking out your stock
- When clearing brush or doing trail work, consider wearing 'gators' for protection, especially if running equipment.
- If you encounter a rattlesnake on the trail, give it a wide berth.
- Always be aware of your surroundings and the trail ahead of you.

Did you know more people die from rodent related causes than from rattlesnake bites? A rattlesnake's main prey is rodents!

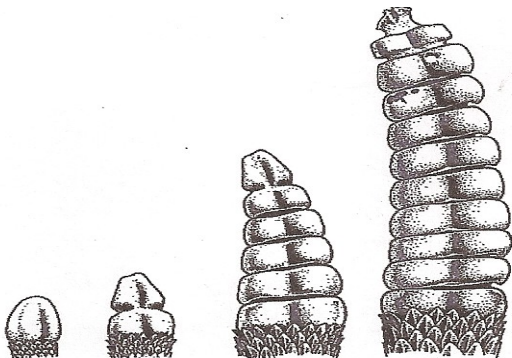


Rattlesnakes can unhinge their jaws, allowing them to swallow large rodents whole. When closing their mouths, the fangs tuck backwards against the roof of the mouth



Rattlesnakes have a triangular shaped head as demonstrated by this red diamond .

Each time they shed, a new segment is added to their rattle. This can happen 2-3 times per year.



## IF BITTEN BY A RATTLESNAKE

- Keep the bite area still. Try using a splint to immobilize the bite
- Remove anything that could cause constriction if there is swelling
- Keep the area of the bite lower than the heart. Remain calm.
- Seek immediate medical help

### IF YOUR HORSE IS BITTEN

Most bites in horses happen in the face. This is due to the horse's natural curiosity when encountering a snake. Swelling of the nose probably will happen and because a horse can only breathe through the nose, suffocation could occur. Take two 5-6" sections of garden hose and insert carefully into each nostril. Using Vaseline or spittle on the end of the hose will help it to glide in smoothly. Do not cut or apply ice to the bite area. Contact a vet immediately. If out on the trail walk your horse slowly to the trailer. Try to keep the horse calm. Remove any tack that might be constrictive during swelling.

If the bite happens in the leg, it might not swell as much. This does not mean that it isn't as serious. Immediately contact your vet and keep your horse calm.

Approved for distribution by  
**Backcountry Horsemen  
 of California**

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Box 217 Bakersfield, Ca. 93314

# Living With Rattlesnakes

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