



Rattlesnake

National Wildlife Refuge System

- There are more than 30 known species of rattlesnakes. The most common in North America are timber rattlesnake, prairie rattlesnake, eastern diamondback rattlesnake and western diamondback rattlesnake.
- All rattlesnakes have a venomous bite, a triangular head and, once they reach maturity, a rattle on their tail. The bite is dangerous but when treated properly, rarely fatal to humans.
- Rattlesnakes can be found in the wild in all of the Lower 48 states but are concentrated in the Southwest. They live in coastal, prairie, desert and mountain habitats.
- Rattlesnakes are carnivorous. They stun prey with a venomous bite and swallow prey whole. They eat lizards, rats, mice, squirrels and small rabbits. A heat-sensitive “pit” on each side of the head helps the snake locate prey.
- Rattlesnakes range in length from less than one foot to eight feet. The eastern diamondback rattlesnake is the longest (up to eight feet) and heaviest (four to eight pounds). Most species are two to four feet long.
- Rattlesnakes can live 30 years. They are ovoviviparous (eggs incubate inside the mother). Babies are born live, usually in litters of eight to 10. Mothers don’t spend time with their young, slithering off soon after offspring are born.

- A rattlesnake’s rattle comes from interlocking keratin rings on its tail. Keratin is similar to human fingernails. A ring is added each time the snake sheds its skin. When

vibrated, the rings make a hissing sound that warns off potential predators. Young rattlesnakes have no rattles and some older adults lose their rattles.



Western diamondback rattlesnake by Aaron Drew/USFWS



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