

Venomous Snakes

Prairie Rattlesnake



Western Massasauga



Timber Rattlesnake



Copperhead



Western Diamond-backed Rattlesnake



Western Pygmy Rattlesnake



Western Cottonmouth



of Oklahoma

Venomous Snakes of Oklahoma



Facts

Oklahoma is home to 46 snake species. Of these, seven species are venomous and belong to a group known as pit vipers; all of which are shown on this poster. Oklahoma's venomous snakes share several physical and behavioral traits. In all species, the head is noticeably wider than the neck and is somewhat triangular in shape. They all periodically shed and regrow their fangs. The eyes of each species have elliptical pupils (similar to the eyes of cats) that help them see at night. The scales on the back and sides are keeled – meaning that there is a raised ridge in the center of each scale. All species have a pair of small heat-sensing pits between the eyes and the nostrils that help them hunt by following the heat trails left by their prey. Each species often hunts by remaining in one place and ambushing its prey. Many are distinguished by the rattle on their tail. None of Oklahoma's venomous snakes lay eggs; the young develop within the female's body and she gives birth to them in the late summer. During warm weather, each species is active primarily at night; during cooler weather in the spring and fall they are active primarily during the day. Many of these species hibernate in communal dens during late fall and winter, often with nonvenomous snakes. Seek medical attention if bitten by a venomous snake - do not try to treat the bite yourself.

REPTILE REGULATIONS: For complete reptile regulations in Oklahoma, refer to the *Oklahoma Hunting Guide* online at wildlifedepartment.com.

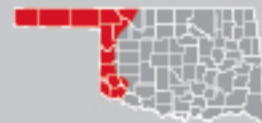
The photos, range maps and text were adapted from the publication, "A Field Guide to Oklahoma's Amphibians and Reptiles," by Greg and Lynnette Sievert, which is available at the offices of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and online at wildlifedepartment.com. Each snake's approximate distribution in Oklahoma is shown in red on the range maps.

Prairie Rattlesnake



Photo by Greg Sievert

The Prairie Rattlesnake can be found in rocky outcrops or canyons, open grasslands and prairie dog towns. This snake spends its days in rodent burrows. The adult length ranges from 34 to 45 inches. The background color is grayish-brown or yellowish-brown, often with a greenish cast. There are brown blotches with dark edges along the middle of the back; on the tail these change to dark brown bands. The tail has large rattles. The plain belly is white to cream. The Prairie Rattlesnake is aggressive and has very toxic venom.

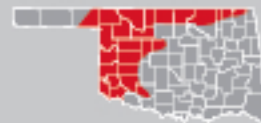


Western Massasauga



Photo by Greg Sievert

The Western Massasauga, also called the "sand rattler" or "ground rattler," can be found near wetlands and prairie hillsides. The adult length ranges from 18 to 26 inches. The background color is a light grayish-brown. Along the center of the back there is a row of dark brown blotches edged in white. On each side, there are two or three rows of small, often faded blotches. The tail has small rattles that make little sound. The belly is light gray with some dark mottling along the edges. The Western Massasauga is an aggressive snake and will not hesitate to strike.

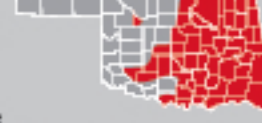


Copperhead



Photo by Greg Sievert

The Copperhead can be found in a wide variety of habitats. The adult length ranges from 22 to 36 inches. There are three subspecies of copperheads in Oklahoma that show modest color and band width variations: Broad-banded Copperhead, Osage Copperhead and Southern Copperhead. The body pattern consists of alternating light and dark bands. The light bands are often tan with a white border; the darker bands are copper or reddish-brown with a pinkish tinge. The dark bands are hourglass-shaped and the central region is lighter than the outer edge. A juvenile has a yellow tail tip. The venom is rarely fatal, but causes local tissue damage.

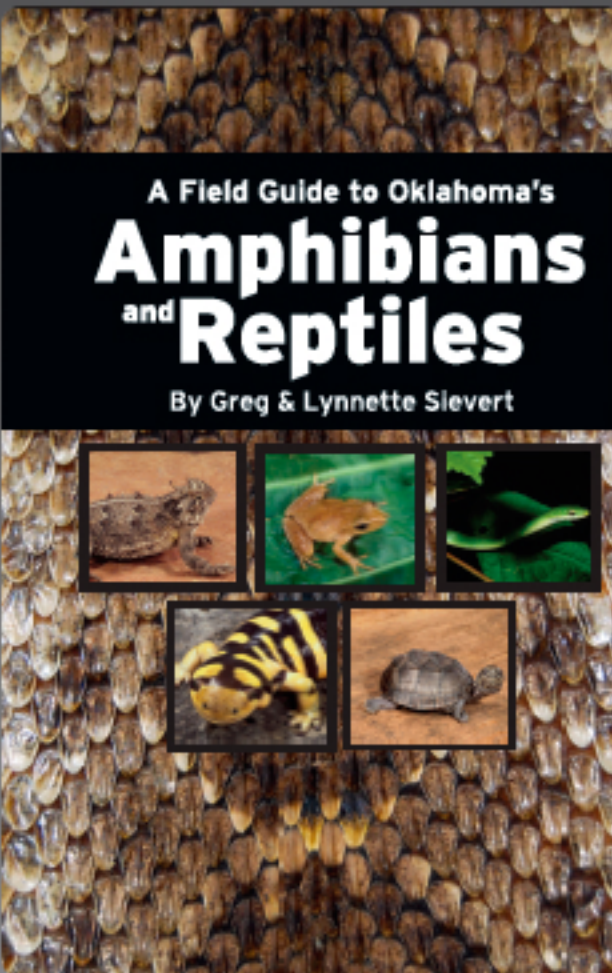
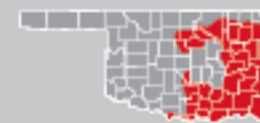


Timber Rattlesnake



Photo by Greg Sievert

The Timber Rattlesnake can be found in a variety of forested habitats from rocky, wooded hillsides to swampy wetlands. The adult length ranges from 35 to 54 inches. The color of timber rattlesnakes varies; some individuals are nearly black and others are light-colored (yellowish-tan shown above). This snake has dark bar-shaped or rectangular cross bands on the back half of the body and dark blotches on the front near the head. Some have a rusty-red stripe along the back, thus this species is sometimes referred to as the "canebrake rattlesnake" in southeastern Oklahoma. The tail is not patterned, has large rattles and a dark, velvet appearance. Thus, this species is often called the "velvet tail"

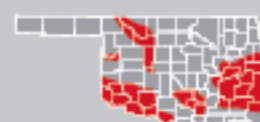


Western Diamond-backed Rattlesnake



Photo by Greg Sievert

The Western Diamond-backed Rattlesnake can be found in arid areas, rocky outcrops, and bluffs. As an adult, this snake ranges from 30 to 72 inches long, and is the largest venomous snake in Oklahoma. There are dark, diamond-shaped blotches edged with white along the back. The background is a grayish-brown. This is the only rattlesnake in Oklahoma that has bold black and white bands on the tail, thus it is often known as the "coon tail rattler." It will avoid confrontation if possible, but it is rather aggressive and will usually rattle its tail and can strike if disturbed. In Oklahoma, this species hibernates in dens - sometimes in large numbers.



Western Pygmy Rattlesnake



Photo by Greg Sievert

The Western Pygmy Rattlesnake can be found in a variety of habitats, often in association with oak woodlands or mixed oak-pine forests. The adult length ranges from 15 to 20 inches. The background color of this snake is gray - sometimes with a lavender tint. It has dark blotches, which appear to be rectangular bars along the back. On the sides there are one or two rows of small, dark, faded blotches. A thin, reddish to chestnut stripe extends along the back through the dorsal blotches. The belly is cream with many dark blotches or bars. This small snake has a rattle that sounds similar to an insect buzz, and is hard to hear. It is locally known as the "ground rattler." This snake rarely bites humans and is not as toxic as other rattlesnakes.



Western Cottonmouth



Photo by Greg Sievert

The Western Cottonmouth can be found in swamps, marshes, and wetlands, along streams or around permanent sources of water such as ponds. The adult length ranges from 20 to 42 inches. There are alternating dark-brown and nearly black bands that run across the body. These are distinct in a juvenile but often blend together in an adult and make them appear almost uniformly dark. The belly has many large, dark blotches that make it appear dark. A juvenile has a yellow to yellow-green tail tip. It will open its mouth at an intruder exposing the cotton-white color. It often swims with its head, neck, and back out of the water, while non-venomous watersnakes commonly swim with only the head and neck out of the water. It is often called a "water moccasin."

