

Colorado rattlesnakes



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

I am not considered as a fearless man by most people. The term “chicken” might be used, but I prefer “prudent.” The folks that know me best can’t believe that for the last decade, I have been hunting dangerous game. Those same people have told me, that on a one-to-one basis, facing a Cape buffalo, they would bet on a stale length of salami.

The same collection of my friends also has their fears, and the worst one seemingly being snakes. Just the mention of the word “snake” will send them into a frenzy, hopping up and down, and seeking cover in the nearest tavern. I, on the other hand, have no fear of snakes anymore.

After hunting in South America and Africa multiple times, not to mention, 20 plus years in the Florida Everglades, I am kind of numb to poisonous snakes. Everything from rattlesnakes, moccasins, coral snakes, and copperheads in the U.S., to the yarara of South America, and the gaboon vipers or black mamba found on the dark continent, I have encountered them all.

Colorado has poisonous snakes, in the form of rattlesnakes. While not as deadly as other pit vipers, an untreated chomp from one could send you to eternal bliss a bit ahead of schedule.

Most people in Col-

orado have not seen a rattlesnake but don’t think for a minute they aren’t there. Actually, they are quite common in certain areas, you just don’t see them when you are out there with them. If you learn where to look for them, you might see more than you want.

According to the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, venomous snakes bite 7,000 to 8000 persons every year in the United States. On average, around 10 people die annually from a venomous snakebite. In Colorado, you have a better chance of being struck by lightning, but around 200 bites are recorded here annually.

Colorado is home to 30 species of snakes but only three pose a danger to people. They are the Prairie Rattlesnake, Midget-Faded Rattlesnake and the Massasauga Rattlesnake. The Prairie and Midget-Faded are found in our area of Western Colorado, usually at elevations below 9,000 feet, while the Massasauga is more to the Southeastern part of the state.

The Prairie rattler is common all around the State, but the one you are most likely to encounter in Montrose and Delta counties is the Midget-Faded rattler. He will answer to faded rattlesnake and yellow rattlesnake, but in the yellow pages he is Crotalus concolor.

Around Montrose and Delta, we have several places that are perfect habitat for rattlesnakes. I have run into snakes at the Black Canyon and Escalante a number of times. Usually, I have seen them resting or sunning themselves around rocky outcroppings. Territorial in nature, rattlers will usually hang around certain areas.

As spring turns into



This is picture of my longtime friend Jimmy Cravey, holding an Eastern Diamondback that is about as large and deadly as any snake you might ever encounter in the U.S. Our Colorado snakes are much smaller, thank goodness. (Courtesy photo)

summer and the temperatures rise, snakes will come out of hibernation. On a warm day, it is not unusual to see a rattlesnake sunning himself on a rock. Along hiking trails, snakes will often seek warmth, laying up in the middle of the trail.

Snakes, like the bull snake, rat snake, and corn snake are often mistaken for rattlers, so proper identification is essential. Rattlesnakes have a thick body, whereas most nonpoisonous snakes have slender bodies. A common garter snake is usually 3-feet long and as big around as your index finger. In contrast, a three-foot-long rattler would be as big around as your wrist.

The rattle on the end of the snake’s tail is the most distinctive characteristic. The rattle is incorrectly used to judge a snake’s age, each ring representing a year. The snake adds a ring every time he sheds a skin, which can be several times during the year.

Don’t assume that it is not a rattlesnake just because there is no rattle, as rattles are quite fragile and easily lost. Often times, you will see a snake with some of the rattles broken or missing. Young snakes may not have developed a rattle yet. Even if the rattle is missing or not developed, a rattlesnake’s tail will end abruptly in a blunt point.

Encountering an aggravated rattler is an event you will never forget. A coiled rattler “looks” scary and will give a shiver to anyone other than a congenital idiot. They will elevate themselves into an “S” shaped coil and inflate its body to look as large as possible. He will make hissing sounds and rattle his tail, raising his head off the ground. I had a 5-footer coil up like that once when I was turkey hunting in Alabama. It is definitely a sight that will make a believer out of you.

The rattle is employed as a warning, one you best heed. The sound emitted

is often described as a dry, high-pitched buzzing. I am hard of hearing from many years with firearms, so a rattler would have to be launching flash-bangs and playing a bass drum for me to hear him. For those of you with good hearing, remember that a young snake, or one without a rattle, will not make any warning noise.

Stepping over a log or rock, without seeing what is under or next to said log or rack, is the most likely way to get bit. Most bites occur on the hands, feet and lower legs. Be careful where you reach, step or sit. Snakes love to hide, and you don’t want to reach into the brush for something without looking carefully first. Same goes for those little “potty breaks” in the woods, look before you squat. If you have to walk in tall grass or thick brush, use a walking stick to prod along with in front of you.

If you, or someone in your group should happen to get bit, don’t panic. Look for swelling and bloody colored blisters beginning to form in the bite area. These symptoms would mean it was a venomous snakebite. About 25 percent of the time, the bites are dry, where the snake does not release any venom, but unless you can consistently pick six numbers in the lotto, best to not take that chance.

Immediately contact 911, as time is of the essence. Most deaths occur because people delayed getting help. If you are unsure of it being a venomous snake, seek help anyway, and don’t try to catch the snake for ID later. Multiple bit people become a bigger problem.

Stay calm and immobilize the bitten area. Make a splint if possible but do not tie it tight, as you don’t want to reduce the blood

flow. Never use a tourniquet or apply ice to the area. Avoid cutting and sucking out the venom. Those old kits with the razor blade and suction cups are no longer recommended. You don’t want your nervous buddy cutting on you with a razor, especially with all those arteries around.

Remove any tight clothing, watches or jewelry around the bite area in advance of the inevitable swelling. Try and call ahead to the medical facility and let them know the situation. This will enable the staff to get ready the anti-venom that will be used to combat the bite. Anti-venom is not always used because people are allergic to the serum. More people die from the cure than from the bite itself.

I am not exactly courageous around vipers, preferring the term “prudent.” Keep an eye out for them and give them distance when you see one. If you encounter one, take a picture and leave him alone, as rattlers are not aggressive and will not chase you. They will warn you and move away, leaving you to go about your day in the woods.

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Experience world-class fishing in Colorado for free, June 6-7

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) invites resident and nonresident anglers of all ages to participate in Free Fishing Weekend. On June 6-7, 2026, Colorado fishing license and Habitat Stamp requirements are waived, allowing anyone to fish in Colorado’s 6,000 miles of streams and over 1,300 lakes and reservoirs for free.

Colorado offers a diverse range of fishes, including over 35 warm-

and cold-water species that live in some of the nation’s most scenic bodies of water. Colorado offers Gold Medal and Quality Waters for anglers. CPW fish management biologists have identified and nominated these waters based on fish sampling records, creel surveys and professional biological assessments. To find fishing locations, stocking reports and other resources, use the CPW Fishing Atlas or visit cpw.state.co.us/fishing

All Colorado fishing regulations still apply as outlined in the 2026 Colorado Fishing Brochure (Pesca en Colorado En Español). Anglers are required to follow any posted signage regarding water or fishing closures.

“Fishing is a great activity to share with family and friends, and the perfect chance to get outside and enjoy Colorado’s natural resources,” said Angler Education Coordinator Andre Egli. “If you are new to fishing, a

variety of beginner classes are offered around the state. Classes are available for new anglers, families or seasoned anglers that want to learn a new technique like fly fishing.”

Join Colorado’s vibrant fishing community by participating in CPW-hosted fishing classes, events and tournaments at Colorado state parks and state wildlife areas. Events are posted on the CPW Event Calendar. Stay updated on fishing news in Colo-



Colorado Parks and Wildlife sponsors a free fishing weekend on June 6-7. (Courtesy photo/CPW)

rado by subscribing to the CPW Fishing eNews and Fishing Report for monthly fishing stories, stocking reports and fishery surveys.

For more outdoor fun, the public is invited to

attend the free annual Get Outdoors Day family recreation festival on Saturday, June 6 (9 a.m.-2 p.m.) at Prospect Lake in Colorado Springs’

See FISHING page B3





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