

# Venomous Snakes of the Southeastern U.S.

## VENOMOUS SNAKE IDENTIFICATION

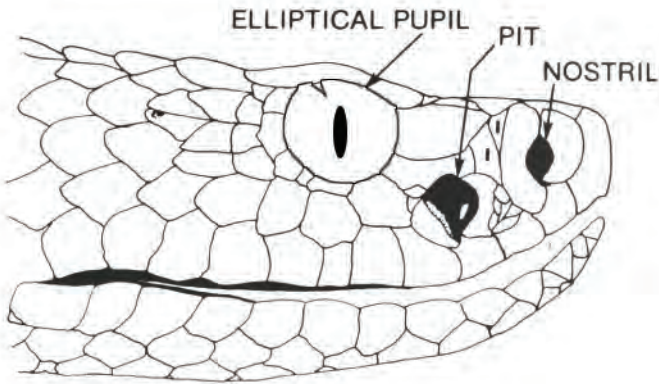
As a resident of the southeastern United States, it is important that you learn to identify those regional species that may pose a threat to humans. Then, by process of elimination, all others can be recognized as harmless (nonvenomous). Knowing the following characteristics is helpful.

CORALSSNAKE - Red and yellow rings touch (every other ring yellow). Similar non-venomous species have red and black rings or blotches touching (every other ring black).

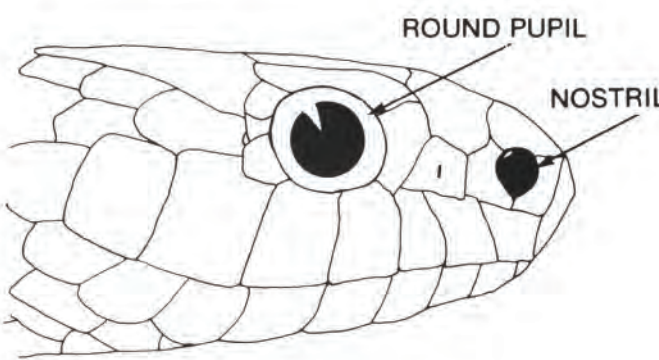
RATTLESNAKES, COTTONMOUTH, AND COPPERHEAD - Pupils elliptical, sensory pit present between nostril and eye, most scales on underside of tail single like belly scales, not divided. DON'T RELY ON TRIANGULAR HEAD.

The easiest way to recognize the six venomous species is to learn their patterns and coloration, much as you do common birds.

### PIT VIPERS - VENOMOUS



### NONVENOMOUS (except coral snake)



Both young cottonmouths and copperheads have a yellow-tipped tail that is used as a lure for prey.



Pygmy Rattlesnake  
*Sistrurus miliarius*



Northern Cottonmouth  
*Agkistrodon piscivorus*  
Juvenile pictured to the left



Eastern Diamond-backed Rattlesnake  
*Crotalus adamanteus*

## TO AVOID BEING BITTEN

1. Don't put your hands or feet in places you cannot see or have not examined. Do not turn over rocks, logs, or trash with your hands.
2. Don't crawl under fences, buildings, or other objects without carefully looking under them.
3. In the wild, don't sit, stand or walk without looking.
4. Don't wear low-cut shoes or swim in areas known to be infested with venomous snakes.
5. Don't gather firewood after dark or without looking carefully.
6. Don't sleep on the ground near woodpiles, cave entrances, or swampy areas.
7. Don't be careless when moving boats left on shore for several hours.
8. Don't disturb snakes, or unnecessarily try to kill them.
9. Don't handle 'dead' snakes with your hands.
10. Don't attempt to capture snakes unless you are skilled.
11. Don't get within a snake's striking distance while trying to identify it.
12. Don't travel alone in snake-infested areas.
13. Don't stay near a snake if it bites you.
14. Don't forget that venomous snakes can climb trees, can bite under water, do occur in high altitudes, and may enter saltwater.

## EMERGENCY TREATMENT

1. Calm and reassure the victim; don't panic.
2. Remove all rings, bracelets, or other constricting items.
3. Immobilize the bitten area as much as circumstances allow. Keep the bitten area above heart level if possible. This is a newly accepted medical concept.
4. Take victim to medical facility as quickly as possible. CALL AHEAD TO ALERT EMERGENCY ROOM YOU ARE ON YOUR WAY. This is a medical emergency, and they need to prepare.

### NOTE:

Do not give victim any drink or food by mouth.  
Do not use a constriction band or tourniquet in the absence of an obviously severe envenomation.  
Do not place ice on bitten extremity, and don't use electric shock.  
Do not make any cuts.  
Only a physician should administer antivenom.  
If feasible, bring dead snake for positive identification (use caution - don't get bitten again!).

## SNAKEBITE STATISTICS

Most snakebites are by non-venomous species. Of all the bites by venomous snakes, 25-50% do not inject any venom. MORE IMPORTANT, MORTALITY IS LESS THAN 1% FOR PHYSICIAN TREATED VENOMOUS SNAKEBITES IN THE UNITED STATES.

## IDENTIFICATION AID

Snakes pictured are generally typical; however, some variation in color and markings does occur. If in doubt, consult an identification expert.

Herpetologist, Loyola University	(504) 865-2107
Reptile Curator, Audubon Zoo (New Orleans)	(504) 212-5240
Museum of Natural Science, LSU (Baton Rouge)	(225) 578-2855
Museum of Natural Science, LSU (Shreveport)	(318) 797-5338
Acadiana Park Nature Station (Lafayette)	(337) 291-8448
Walter B. Jacobs Nature Park (Shreveport)	(318) 929-2806
Louisiana Purchase Gardens & Zoo (Monroe)	(318) 329-2400
Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center (Baton Rouge)	(225) 757-8905

## VENOMOUS SNAKEBITE MANAGEMENT CONSULTATION

Check with your local emergency rooms to ensure that they have medical experience with venomous snakebites.

Ochsner Hospital Emergency Room (New Orleans)	(504) 842-3460
West Jefferson Medical Center (Marrero)	(504) 349-1533
Ochsner Hospital Emergency Room (Baton Rouge)	(225) 358-1000
East Jefferson General Hospital (Metairie)	(504) 454-4000
Slidell Memorial Hospital (Slidell)	(985) 649-8542
St. Tammany Parish Hospital (Covington)	(985) 898-4000

## INFORMATION ABOUT AVAILABLE ANTIVENOMS (including exotic species)

Arizona Poison Center (Clearinghouse)	(520) 626-6016
Alabama Regional Poison Control Center	(205) 939-9201
Florida Poison Information Center	(813) 253-4444
Georgia Poison Center	(404) 616-9000
Louisiana Poison Control Center	(318) 342-3648
Texas State Poison Center	(214) 589-0911



Eastern Copperhead  
*Agkistrodon contortrix*



Timber (Canebrake) Rattlesnake  
*Crotalus horridus*



## Coralsnake

Texas Coralsnake, *Micrurus tener*, above,  
west of the Mississippi River  
Harlequin Coralsnake, *Micrurus fulvius*,  
east of the Mississippi River