



CORN SNAKE  
MELISSA MCGAW/NCWRC

# COEXIST WITH *Snakes*

Few creatures are as widely misunderstood as snakes. Fueled by myths and old-wives tales, many people fear snakes and worry for the safety of people and pets when snakes are present. In reality, snakes are shy creatures that pose little to no threat to us when left alone. Snakes are an important part of our environment, keeping populations of pests such as rodents, slugs, and insects in check. Plus, snakes are a food resource to other animals such as foxes, raccoons, bears, eagles, hawks, and owls.



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BLACK RACER

## **Snake Quick Facts:**

### **How many snakes in North Carolina are Venomous?**

Out of the thirty-seven different species of snakes in North Carolina, only six are venomous. Venomous snakes include the Copperhead, Cottonmouth, Timber Rattlesnake, Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake, Pigmy Rattlesnake, and the Eastern Coral Snake. The Copperhead is the most common and widespread venomous snake in North Carolina, occurring in both rural and urban environments. Four of the six are protected species in North Carolina, and as such, should not be handled or disturbed: the Timber and Pigmy Rattlesnakes are both Species of Special Concern, while the Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake and Eastern Coral Snake are both Endangered.

### **Why do snakes shed their skins?**

As a snake grows, its body increases in size, but its skin does not grow with it. Therefore, as they grow, snakes must replace their smaller skins with larger ones. The act of shedding old skin also removes any parasites that may have been present on their skin. Snakes shed their skins in a manner similar to that of pulling off a sock inside out. A snake's shed skin can be useful in identifying the species of snake.

### **Do snakes pose a threat to humans or pets?**

Snake diets vary widely, ranging from mice and other small mammals to birds, fish, and invertebrates (insects, worms,

etc.). Snakes do not regard humans as prey. A snake is more likely to seek escape when confronted, rather than attack. However, if snakes are disturbed or put in a situation without an escape route, they will bite or lunge outward to defend themselves. In general, if left alone, snakes pose no threat to humans or pets.

### **What should I do when I see a snake?**

When someone encounters a snake, usually the person and the snake are both caught off guard. The best plan is to leave the snake alone and give it plenty of space. In most cases, given time, the snake will move out of the area on its own. Like all reptiles, snakes are cold-blooded, meaning that their internal temperatures follow that of the ambient temperatures where they are found. On a cool day, a snake encountered basking may not yet have the energy to move away from you, so it may require more time and warmer temperatures before it can retreat.

### **Will someone remove snakes from my property?**

The N. C. Wildlife Resources Commission does not send people out to trap and remove snakes. Removing one snake is not going to stop another from taking its place. Snakes are found all over NC, from forests to cities, so it makes sense to learn to live with them. The best plan for citizens of North Carolina is to learn about snakes and alter habits to minimize negative interactions, and in the process, learn to coexist with snakes.

TIMBER RATTLESNAKE  
PETER REA/USFWS

## Preventing Conflicts with Snakes



DENNIS CHURCH/FLICKR

BANDED WATER SNAKE



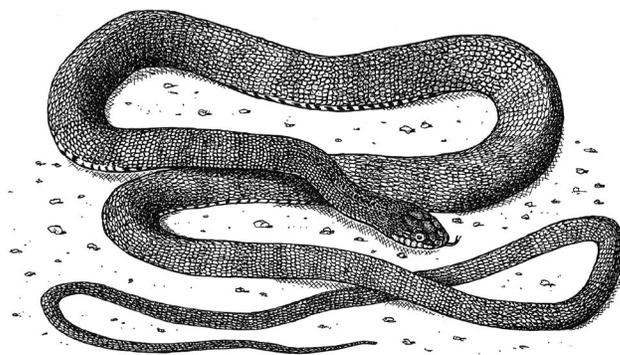
NATALIE MCNEAR/FLICKR

COPPERHEAD

- **DECLUTTER YOUR YARD.** Snakes seek out areas with thick cover where rodents and other prey species are likely to be found. Keeping bushes and plants around your home trimmed and clearing out piles of rock, wood, and other debris will make your property less appealing for snakes.
- **REMOVE ENTRY POINTS.** Discourage snakes from entering your home by closing gaps and holes. Repair damage to siding and foundations and permanently seal openings under doors, windows, and around water pipes. Securing your home will help keep snakes (and other wildlife) out of your living space.
- **BE AWARE OF YOUR SURROUNDINGS.** As you go for walks outside, do yard work, or work in the garden, be aware that snakes could be in the area. Being prepared for the possibility of encountering a snake and watching where you step and place your hands can minimize the chance of you disturbing or stepping on a snake.
- **EDUCATE YOURSELF AND OTHERS.** Always stay a respectful distance away from snakes (and other wildlife) and remind kids to look but not touch. Learning how to identify the species of snakes that commonly occur in your area will help you during an encounter. A good online resource for identifying snakes can be found at [herpsofnc.org](http://herpsofnc.org). If you see a snake and would like help in identifying the

species, you can email photos to [wrccomments@ncwildlife.org](mailto:wrccomments@ncwildlife.org).

- **IF YOU NEED ASSISTANCE REMOVING A SNAKE INSIDE YOUR HOME:** Contact a local, certified Wildlife Damage Control Agent. These are private individuals who charge for their services. You can locate a WDCA in your county by visiting the "Coexisting with Wildlife" page at [ncwildlife.org](http://ncwildlife.org).



BLACK RAT SNAKE