

Characteristics of Venomous Snakes

- Vertical pupil (Figure 7)
- Pit organ: The pit organ is located on each side of the head between the eye and nostril (Figure 7) It detects heat from small mammals and other prey
- The scales under the tail form only a single row (Figure 8)
- The head is distinctly wider than the neck giving the snake a triangular shaped head

Non-venomous

Venomous

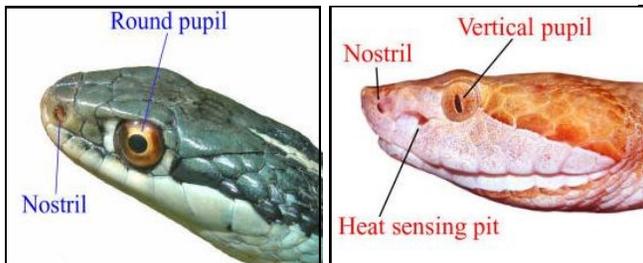


Figure 7. Facial characteristics of non-venomous and venomous snakes of southeastern Virginia.

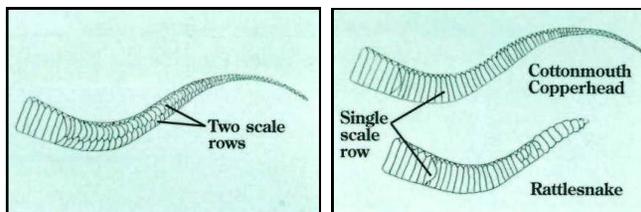


Figure 8. Undersides of tails of a non-venomous and venomous snakes of southeastern Virginia.

If You Encounter a Snake

Leave the snake alone and move away. Approximately half of all bites occur when individuals were attempting to capture, harass, or kill the snake.

Snake Safety Tips

- Snakes prey on small animals including mice, rats, lizards, and frogs. Removing habitat for these animals (eliminating brush piles, wood piles, sources of food, etc.) will help reduce unwelcome encounters with snakes.
- Be careful working around brush piles or other debris. Use a rake or long handled tool to move brush, debris, or other materials before picking it up.
- Wear snake chaps or tall leather boots when walking in thick vegetation.
- Seek medical attention immediately if you are bitten by any venomous or unknown snake. Do not attempt to draw out the venom. If possible, collect the snake or provide a description of the animal to medical staff.

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Venomous Snakes of Southeastern Virginia



Timber Rattlesnake



Copperhead



Cottonmouth

Timber Rattlesnake

(*Crotalus horridus*)



Figure 1. Timber Rattlesnake



Figure 2. Rattle of Timber Rattlesnake.
Shape of rattle and number of segments.

Description

- Black chevron-shaped markings on a dark yellow, gray or tan background color
- Orange or rust-brown stripe down the middle of the back
- Black tail with distinctive rattle
- Newborns look like adults, but rattle consists of only one segment

Size

Average length: 54 inches
Maximum length in Virginia: 67 inches

Remarks

This snake was listed as State Endangered in 1992, primarily due to habitat loss. These snakes are present at NALF Fentress and NSAHR Northwest Annex.

Copperhead

(*Agkistrodon contortrix*)



Figures 3 and 4. Copperhead

Description

- Chestnut to brown hourglass-shaped bands on a lighter brown to tan background color
- Hourglass markings on the sides may not always match up along the back
- Newborns and young have a bright yellow tail

Size

Average length: 45.3 inches
Maximum length in Virginia: 48 inches

Remarks

This secretive snake occupies forested habitats. It is present at JEB Little Creek-Fort Story (Fort Story only), NALF Fentress, NAS Oceana, NSAHR Northwest Annex, NWS Yorktown, and Cheatham Annex.

Cottonmouth

(*Agkistrodon piscivorus*)



Figures 5 and 6. Cottonmouth

Description

- Black, olive or brown bands on a lighter olive to gray background
- Some individuals may appear to be all black in color, especially when out of the water
- Newborns and young have a bright yellow tail

Size

Average length: 51.8 inches
Maximum length in Virginia: 61 inches

Remarks

Habitats used by this snake include: streams, lakes, rivers and ditches. It is present on JEB Little Creek-Fort Story (Fort Story only), NALF Fentress, NAS Oceana, and Dam Neck Annex.