HIKER-NOTE: Venomous Snakes of Georgia
UGA OUTDOOR RECREATION CENTER
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Georgia is home to over 40 different types of snakes but only 6 of these are poisonous. Knowing the difference between a poisonous snake and a non-poisonous snake could mean life or death in some situations. All the snakes listed below should be approached with caution if encountered in the wild. The best thing to do is back up and walk briskly away. The snake, unless aggressive, will be much more afraid of you. If you find one in your yard don't kill it. Call the local animal control so they can remove it and release it somewhere else.

Copperhead
The Copperhead is related to the Cottonmouth snake. More people in the southeast are bitten by this snake than any other. Even though it bites more people, its venom is rarely fatal if treatment is sought within adequate time. Copperheads get their name from the copper color of their heads. The sides of the snake are tan and the back is a dark chestnut color. The colors are often patterned like an hour glass. A baby copperhead will look just like an adult except its tail will be bright yellow. Copperheads do like water. They blend in very well with the ground and this is why so many people are bitten. Without seeing the snake they accidentally step on them. This snake doesn't like to bite and will give you a warning by vibrating its tail. If threatened it will defend itself.

Cottonmouth
The cottonmouth or "water moccasin" is an aggressive snake. This snake has been known to actually go after someone who gets too close. They don't necessarily want to hurt people but they are extremely territorial and will defend their ground. It is the only poisonous water snake in North America. The cottonmouth has a distinctive triangular shaped head and strong jaws. Its bite is much more painful than some snakes. It doesn't simply strike but it latches on to its victim. You can find these snakes near water or laying out on a rock or tree stump waiting for its prey to stumble by. When young, they look similar to the Copperhead because the babies have bright yellow or lime colored tails. Adult snakes have a pale or yellow colored belly and their back and sides are brown, black or olive colored. Older snakes tend to be darker in color than the younger ones.

Coral Snake
The Coral snake is venomous but its bite is rarely fatal. If you can get to the hospital in time you should be fine. The Scarlet King snake and the Scarlet snake look a lot like the coral snake but you can tell them apart by looking at the nose. The coral snake has a black nose while the other two snakes have red noses. The stripes on the Coral snake go all the way around the body and this is not so with the scarlet snake who has a light colored belly. Coral snakes have bands of red, black and yellow. They are 20 to 30 inches long and feed on other snakes, lizards and frogs. They prefer to live under debris like fallen trees and don't like being out in the open. Some of them find holes and live comfortably inside. Just remember the poem:

*If red touches yellow, kill a fellow*
*If red touches back, you can pet its back (or venom lack)*
**Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake**

This snake is easily recognizable by the diamond pattern outlined in white on its back. It can range in color from brown to gray. It has a triangular head (usually large) and a thick body. It can reach up to 8 feet in length and is the largest North American venomous snake. They can be found anywhere in the southeast. They don't mind being out in the open or lying around in abandoned holes. If left alone, these animals will not bite. This snake can be useful because they catch rats and other rodents. If the snake is bothered it will rattle its tail to warn you. If you continue to come closer then it will bite. Diamondbacks can strike up to two thirds of their body length. A six foot snake can strike about four feet. Due to its size this could be considered the most dangerous animal in North America when threatened.

**Timber/Canebrake Rattlesnake**

These snakes usually come out in late spring or early summer. During the cold months they hibernate in caves or holes. In the winter you might have a whole group of Timber rattlesnakes hibernating together although they do hibernate alone as well. The large males can be seen in the later summer while they are out wondering around looking for a female to mate with. Timber rattlesnakes are long and can reach over 6 feet in length. They are normally gray but can be brown, yellowish or even black. The gray snakes can have a pinkish color to their skin. The tail is always black and their bodies have a black V pattern pointing forward, towards the head.

**Pigmy Rattlesnake**

These snakes are very small and the babies could coil up on a card or even a large coin. Although small they are still poisonous. The venom is usually enough to kill a frog, mouse, or other small animal and not enough to kill an adult. Their first line of defense is to remain motionless if bothered. These snakes are easy to step on because they are so small. The average length of a pigmy rattlesnake is 18 inches or smaller. The rattle on their tales is seldom heard due to its size. Pigmy rattlesnakes are usually grey in color and can sometimes have a blue tint. They have a black broken zigzag shaped pattern on their bodies. This snake's temperament greatly varies. Some are aggressive and will attack repeatedly and others will just freeze and not move when approached. If bitten you will likely not die but you will feel the effects of the venom. Children are at a much larger risk of damage than the adults often resulting in a long hospital stay.


_Hiker-Note contributed by Finley Grant, ORC staff member._