

Nature Adventures Module: What should I do if I encounter a rattlesnake?

(Highlighted words are found in the Glossary List)

Terri: If you are someone who enjoys spending time outdoors, particularly in areas west of the Missouri River, there is a chance that you or someone you may know may encounter a rattlesnake.

Todd: I love rattlesnakes, but I do realize that it's important to remember what to do if or when we encounter them.

Terri: Rattlesnakes will usually let you know they are there by rattling their tails. But remember sometimes snakes can't rattle, or may have lost their rattle, so it is important to be alert and watch where you walk or sit as well. In most cases, but not all, rattlesnakes will be heard before being seen.

Todd: If you hear a rattlesnake's rattle, stand still until you can locate the sound. Do not run or jump. These actions may only put you within the snake's striking range. Once you know which way you can escape safely, walk away. If others are around you, be sure to warn them of potential danger.

Terri: A rattlesnake rattling is a distinct sound. Sometimes **non-venomous** snakes will imitate rattlesnakes, so if you are unsure, it would be best to assume it is a rattlesnake and take precautions...better safe than sorry!

Todd: While it is unlikely that you will find yourself in a bad situation with a rattlesnake, you can avoid this scenario by carefully watching where you walk and particularly where you place your hands. Rattlesnakes are very secretive. They survive by avoiding confrontations, particularly with humans. Most people who are bitten were trying to capture or kill the snake, so it is best to leave the snake alone.

Terri: If you or someone are bitten, lay still, remain calm as possible, and call 911. Time is the most important factor of the outcome.

Todd: Rather than seeking to **eradicate** these animals, we have more to gain by finding ways for all of us to **coexist**. Why? Because these animals are the natural predators of other animals, such as mice and rats that can cause plant damage and carry disease. Besides, trying to kill rattlesnakes actually puts us at greater risk than does leaving them alone. Knowledge of "who" these creatures are—that is, what they do for a living, where they live and when they are active—will help us coexist without harm to either snakes or humans. Most rattlesnakes avoid contact with humans. They tend to avoid wide open spaces that offer little protection from predators, so they usually spend their time in and under low-growing shrubs, natural and artificial debris, rocks and the like.