

Cotton Mouth



The cottonmouth moccasin is a pit viper without rattles. Most Florida specimens average about three feet. It occurs commonly in every county in the state and on many coastal islands. Color pattern of the cottonmouth varies from olive-brown to black, with or without dark crossbands on the body. It is stout-bodied with an abruptly tapering tail, and a broad head much wider than the neck. Often when disturbed it draws into a loose coil, cocks its head upwards and opens its mouth wide to reveal the whitish interior lining, hence the name cottonmouth. From this loose-coiled stance, it lunges out in a fast strike to embed its poison-carrying fangs. It does not have to be coiled to strike, but can deliver a bite from almost any position, either in or out of the water. A water snake, the cottonmouth is found along stream banks, in swamps, margins of lakes and in tree-bordered marshes. Baby Cottonmouths are boldly marked with reddish-brown crossbands and bright yellow tails. At this stage they can be mistaken for copperheads.

More Information

For more information about sustainability & the environment please visit.

- Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission
www.floridacconservation.org
- Sustainability Alliance
<http://sustainabilityalliance.ucf.edu>
- Florida Museum of Natural History
www.flmnh.ufl.edu



4000 Central Florida Blvd.
Orlando, FL 32816

Phone: (407) 823-3146
E-mail: nature@mail.ucf.edu
www.green.ucf.edu



LANDSCAPE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Florida Venomous Snakes



Office Hours:

Open Monday - Friday
8am-5pm

Natural Land Hours:

Open 7 days a week from sunrise to sunset

Coral Snake

The coral snake's venom is the most potent of any of North America's snakes. The coral is shy and secretive, seldom aggressive unless startled, tormented or hurt. It has short fangs and a small mouth. It does not strike like the pit vipers but bites and chews to inject its poison. Most bites occur when a "pretty little snake" is picked up by someone who does not recognize it as a venomous one. The coral snake is often confused with the harmless scarlet king snake, which it closely resembles. A helpful rhyme goes, "red touch yellow, kill a fellow; red touch black, good for Jack." The red rings of the coral borders the yellow. The red of the king snake borders the black. Also, the coral has a black nose, the king snake a red nose. The coral snake is a small-sized, slender-bodied reptile with the narrow head and round eye pupils characteristic of non-poisonous species. Most coral snakes are less than 24 inches in length. Found more or less commonly throughout Florida, the coral inhabits pine woods, pond and lake borders and the jungle-like growth of Florida's hammocks. It favors such places as rotting logs, piles of decaying vegetation, heavy fallen leaf cover and old brush piles. It noses about through decaying vegetation and humus to catch and feed on other snakes, lizards, frogs and other small animals.



Pygmy Rattlesnake



The pygmy rattlesnake, also called ground rattler, is common throughout Florida. It is found in every county and on many of the offshore islands. Its rattle is small and slender and produces a sound like the buzzing of an insect. This warning signal can be heard for no more than a few feet away. Stout-bodied for so small a snake, it is gray in color and marked prominently with rounded, dusky spots. Starting at base of the head, reddish spots alternate with the black along the midline of the back. Most pygmy rattlers measure less than 18 inches in length. This species feeds on small frogs, lizards, mice and other snakes. Like other members of the pit-viper family, it does not lay eggs, but gives live birth to its young. Look for the pygmy rattlesnake in palmetto flatwoods, or in areas of slash pine and wire grass. It may be encountered in almost any locality where there are lakes, ponds, or marshes. It is fortunate that the ground rattler is small, as it has a feisty disposition, and is quick to strike. Its bite produces pain and swelling.

Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake

The eastern diamondback is the largest and most dangerous of our native snakes. Its large body size, quantity of venom, aggressive defensive tactics and tremendous striking speed make this snake one to be treated with extreme caution. The diamondback is recognized by a distinctive pattern of yellow-bordered diamond-shaped body markings. The diamondback occurs in every county in Florida and on many of the coastal islands. It is most commonly encountered in palmetto flatlands, pine woods, abandoned fields, and brushy and grassy areas. In most situations, this snake is difficult to spot since its color pattern blends into the background. When disturbed the rattler assumes a defensive position with the body coiled upon itself, rattle free and elevated to sound a warning whirr, and head and neck raised in an S-position. From this stance, the rattler can repeatedly strike and return to its original position so rapidly that the movements



appear only as a blur to the human eye. The effective striking distance is from one-third to one-half of the snake's body length. When disturbed it generally, but not always, sounds a warning rattle. Newly born rattlers are equipped with venom.