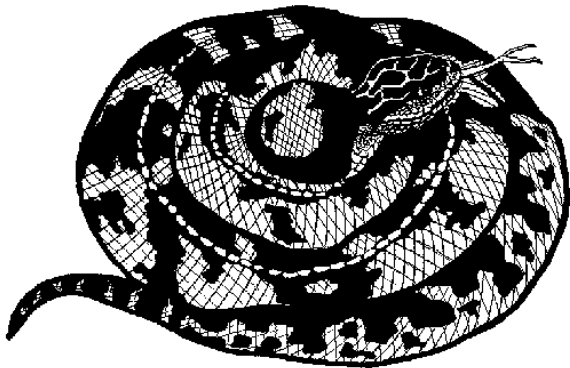

SNAKE SEASON

The Canyon is home to many different kinds of snakes. These snakes are part of the area's natural community and, other than the rattler, are harmless to humans. Local snakes, such as the Garter Snake, Gopher Snake, King Snake, the Blind Snake and Racer (or California Whip Snake) are helpful in controlling pests such as rodents and are not poisonous. These snakes are typically skinny, but broadly range in length from just 5 inches to more than 100 inches.

The Association has received calls from residents who have seen rattlesnakes in their yards. The Pacific Rattlesnake is poisonous so this is a matter of concern, especially for those with young children and pets. An important part of canyon living is learning how to live with snakes – and minimizing the risk of a dangerous encounter with a Rattle Snake – the only poisonous snake in the canyon.

It is important to be able to identify a Rattler. They have blunt-nosed, broad heads, thick bodies and blunt tails, usually with a button or series of rattles at the end of the tail. The baby rattler is about 12 inches long, yellow with dark hexagons on its back, and has a knob or button at the end of its tail instead of rattles.



Baby rattlers are deceptively dangerous because they tend to inject all of their venom in a single bite. Barefoot residents, curious children and pets, and active gardeners are perhaps most at risk from inadvertent contact with baby rattlers. By contrast, adult rattlers would rather scare away intruders by rattling and will not waste all of their venom in one bite, making a single bite less toxic than a baby rattler's bite.

All local rattlers are poisonous – baby and adult. Most adult rattlers in the Canyon are between 3-4 feet long. Adult rattlers are particularly dangerous when they shed their skins or are hunting. Most rattlesnakes, when disturbed, normally try to withdraw. But if they think they are cornered, the explosive sizzling buzz of their rattles is an unmistakable warning to retreat.

If you see a Rattler lying stiff and straight in the open, it is likely "hiding" (hoping you will assume it is either dead or a stick). If you can, walk around the tail end of the snake without disturbing it. A coiled snake is ready to defend itself and can strike half the length of its body. So stay 3-4 feet away.

Rattlesnakes are sit-and-wait predators. They remain coiled next to a regularly used wild animal path, often for days at a time, and wait silently for prey to come within striking distance. After stunning their prey with venom, they swallow the animal, and then move to another favored ambush site. Feeding ceases when winter approaches; these cold-blooded animals cannot digest food when it is cold, so rattlesnakes retreat into deep dens to hibernate until the following spring.

Summer is therefore the time for heightened vigilance. Snakes may enter your yard seeking shade or moisture, and dine on the mice, rats and gophers that may be hidden in your ivy or other foliage. This is a particular risk for young children who cannot recognize the danger. And if you see a baby rattler in your yard, be very careful because there are likely to be other babies and their mother close by.

RATTLESNAKES - USEFUL TIPS TO REMEMBER:

1. Always check your yard before letting children or pets outside in the summer.
2. Be aware of your surroundings at all times, especially when walking through woods, weeds, trails, or bushes.
3. Avoid specific snake habitats – ivy, brush piles, debris mounds, logjams, root systems, abandoned buildings, watery areas, and ground-cover in general.
4. Wear leather shoes or boots ankle high (or more) when walking in potential snake areas.
5. Never sit or climb (feet and hands), or step over obstacles without first looking carefully before making the move.
6. Observation is critical to avoidance. Check around with a sweeping glance for anything that seems out of place.
7. Near water of any kind, be aware that snakes may be near, though concealed from view while they are sleeping or hunting.
8. Do not stalk quietly in snake areas. Snakes have sensing devices to warn them of your presence. These warning signals help snakes avoid you before you are too close to trigger a dangerous confrontation. If you sneak up on a snake, and the snake senses that confrontation

- is necessary, then the snake will attack. Otherwise, the snake would rather avoid you.
9. Take a pet along on outings. Animals are more sensitive to snakes, and will help prevent an unanticipated confrontation (i.e., stepping on or too near a snake).
 10. When a snake is spotted, leave it alone! Don't try to catch it, or kill it. Just avoid it.
 11. Control Rodents. Rattlesnakes are attracted to food (which, for snakes, include rodents), water, and a safe place to live. Thus, rodents are not only destructive to your property, they are a primary source of food for rattlesnakes. Rodents should be eliminated from around the home.
 12. Because snakes utilize the burrows of other animals, rodent holes and tunnels should be filled so that a snake does not take up residence. Tunnels should be filled or covered with quarter inch hardware cloth.
 13. Wood piles or piles of junk are also very attractive to snakes. These should be cleaned up or moved away from the house. Care should be taken when rummaging through them in case you already have a resident!
 14. Walls can be erected to discourage rattlesnakes from enclosed areas. A solid wall four feet high with a four inch lip at the top angling outward will discourage most snakes. The bottom of the wall should be sunk into the ground and have no tunnels under it. Gates should fit snugly against the ground since a one inch opening is an open door to a snake. But remember, there is **NO SUCH THING AS A 100% SNAKE PROOF FENCE**. An athletic snake may climb virtually any wall, and a very tiny snake can move through the smallest of crevices.
 15. Several products that claim to be snake repellents are on the market. Though well-marketed and high priced, there is currently **NO SNAKE REPELLENT** known to be effective. Be skeptical.

16. Persons without training should never handle a rattlesnake. No rattlesnake, not even a dead one, should be picked-up by hand. Reflex bites with envenomation can occur several hours after death. Call the Bureau of Sanitation for dead animal pick up at 310.575-8392.
17. Leave them alone! More than half of all rattlesnake bites are provoked by the person being bitten.
18. Call Animal Control or the Fire Department if you need help determining if a snake is dangerous and should be removed.

TIPS FOR RATTLESNAKE BITES:

Dos:

- Remain calm and reassure the victim.
- Remove all jewelry, watches, etc. from the affected area.
- Immobilize extremity and keep at level below the heart.
- Decrease total body activity as is feasible.
- Move victim to medical facility without delay. UCLA or USC are more likely to have antivenin than a community hospital. Should you be bitten, check before going to a local hospital.

Don'ts:

- Do not apply ice to the bite area.
- Do not make an incision of any kind.
- Do not use a constriction band or tourniquet.
- Do not administer alcohol or drugs.
- Do not use electric shock treatment.

Pets are often bitten by rattlesnakes. Cats tend to hide out after an injury. Despite this, many survive. Although some large dogs do well with no veterinary care, it is recommended that any pet be taken to an emergency veterinary clinic if bitten.

Finally, remember even rattlesnakes are important elements to our natural community. They kill rodents and participate in the natural chain. Of course, you do not want them in your back yards. So take precautions and remove that which will attract snakes to your yard.

Thanks to Susie Gilman for suggesting this article.

