

Common Snakes of North Carolina

Identification, Safety, and Facts





Eastern Rat Snake (Non-Venomous)

- Length: 4–6 feet
- Color: Black, gray, or brown
- Habitat: Forests, farms, barns, attics
- Diet: Rodents, birds, eggs
- Benefit: Excellent natural pest control
- Behavior: Non-aggressive, may vibrate tail when scared



Eastern Garter Snake (Non-Venomous)

- Length: 18–30 inches
 - Color: Greenish or brown with yellow stripes
 - Habitat: Yards, gardens, wetlands
 - Diet: Earthworms, frogs, insects
 - Behavior: Very common and harmless
 - Defense: May release musk when handled



Copperhead (Venomous)

- Length: 2–3 feet
 - Color: Tan with hourglass-shaped bands
 - Habitat: Forest edges, rocky areas, leaf litter
 - Most common venomous snake in NC
 - Venom is rarely fatal but bites require medical care
 - Usually relies on camouflage rather than aggression



Corn Snake (Non-Venomous)

- Length: 3–5 feet
 - Color: Orange/red with black-outlined blotches
 - Habitat: Fields, forests, old buildings
 - Often mistaken for copperheads
 - Diet: Mice and small rodents
 - Popular as a pet due to calm nature



Dekay's Brownsnake

- Length: 9–13 inches (typically small, not 2–3 feet)
 - Color: Light brown to gray with two rows of small dark spots along the back; may have a faint light stripe down the center
 - Habitat: Moist environments such as gardens, woodlands, under leaf litter, logs, and rocks
 - Venom: Non-venomous (harmless to humans)
 - Behavior: Secretive and shy; relies on hiding rather than aggression



Cottonmouth / Water Moccasin (Venomous)

- Length: 2–4 feet
 - Color: Dark brown or black, thick-bodied
 - Habitat: Swamps, lakes, rivers
 - Named for white mouth display when threatened
 - Often mistaken for harmless water snakes
 - Will stand ground but prefers to escape



Northern Watersnake

• round pupils, clearly defined dark bands, wider in the middle

• found in aquatic habitats in the northern coastal plain, piedmont, and mountains of North Carolina

• non-venomous

VS

Cottonmouth

• vertical pupils; diamond-shaped head; hourglass-shaped dark bands or indistinct dark splotching

• white lining of the mouth

• found in aquatic habitats in the eastern regions of North Carolina

• venomous



Banded and Northern Watersnakes (Non- Venomous)

Banded Watersnake

2–4 feet



- Brown, gray, or reddish with distinct dark crossbands
- Slightly wider head than neck
- Non-venomous; will bite defensively if handled

Northern Watersnake

2–4.5 feet



- Brown, gray, or reddish with dark blotches forming bands near the neck, irregular toward the tail
- Head similar in width to body
- Non-venomous; very defensive when threatened

Timber/Canebrake Rattlesnake (Venomous)

- Length: 3–5 feet (adult timber rattlesnakes are typically larger than 2–3 feet)
 - Color: Tan, yellowish-brown, or gray with dark hourglass-shaped crossbands; tail often has a black tip with a rattle
 - Habitat: Deciduous forests, forest edges, rocky outcrops, and areas with dense leaf litter; often found in mountainous or hilly regions
 - Most common venomous snake in NC: Yes, it is one of the most widespread venomous snakes in North Carolina
 - Venom: Potent hemotoxic venom; bites are rarely fatal with prompt medical care, but they require immediate attention
 - Behavior: Generally non-aggressive; relies on camouflage and will often remain motionless rather than strike unless provoked



Eastern Rough Green Snake

- Length: 2–3 feet (typically 22–32 inches)
- Color: Bright green on top with a yellowish or white belly
- Habitat: Shrubs, vines, forest edges, and near water; often found in dense vegetation and trees
- Venom: None; completely harmless to humans
- Behavior: Very docile and shy; relies on camouflage and will rarely bite even when handled



Black Racer

- Length: 3–5 feet (adults typically range from 36–60 inches)
 - Color: Solid black with a white chin; smooth, shiny scales
 - Habitat: Forest edges, open woodlands, fields, and brushy areas; often seen in sunny spots or moving quickly across open ground
 - Venom: None — Black Racers are non-venomous and harmless to humans
 - Behavior: Very fast and alert; relies on speed to escape rather than camouflage; may vibrate tail and strike if cornered but rarely bites unless handled



Eastern King Snake

- Length: 3–4 feet (adults typically range from 36–48 inches)
 - Color: Shiny black with distinct white or yellow chain-like bands across the body
 - Habitat: Forest edges, hardwood forests, fields, and near water sources; often found under logs, leaf litter.
 - Venom: Non-venomous - is harmless to humans and actually preys on other snakes, including venomous species
 - Behavior: Non-aggressive and beneficial; usually relies on hiding and will rarely bite unless handled



Venomous vs Non-Venomous Snakes

- Venomous NC Snakes: Copperhead, Cottonmouth, Rattlesnake
 - Only about 6 venomous species live in NC
- Non-Venomous: Rat snakes, corn snakes, garter snakes
 - Most snake bites happen when snakes are handled or harassed



Non-Venomous Water Snakes of North Carolina

- Common Species: Northern Water Snake, Banded Water Snake, Brown Water Snake
 - Often mistaken for cottonmouths (water moccasins)
 - Appearance: Slender body, round pupils, patterned scales
 - Behavior: Defensive when approached but not aggressive
 - Habitat: Lakes, rivers, ponds, wetlands
 - Diet: Fish, frogs, amphibians
 - Important Note: They are NOT venomous, but should not be harmed



Common Snake Myths

- Myth: All snakes are dangerous
 - Myth: Baby snakes are more dangerous than adults
 - Myth: Snakes chase people
 - Myth: Killing snakes makes areas safer
 - Truth: Snakes avoid humans and help control pests



What to Do If You Find an Injured Snake

- Do NOT attempt to handle the snake unless directed by a professional
 - Keep a safe distance and keep people and pets away
 - If the snake is in immediate danger (road, construction area), call for guidance
 - Take note of the snake's location, size, and appearance
 - Contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator immediately:
 - Carolina Wildlife Rehabilitation Center
 - Phone: 1-800-388-2972
 - Website: www.cwrcwildlife.org

