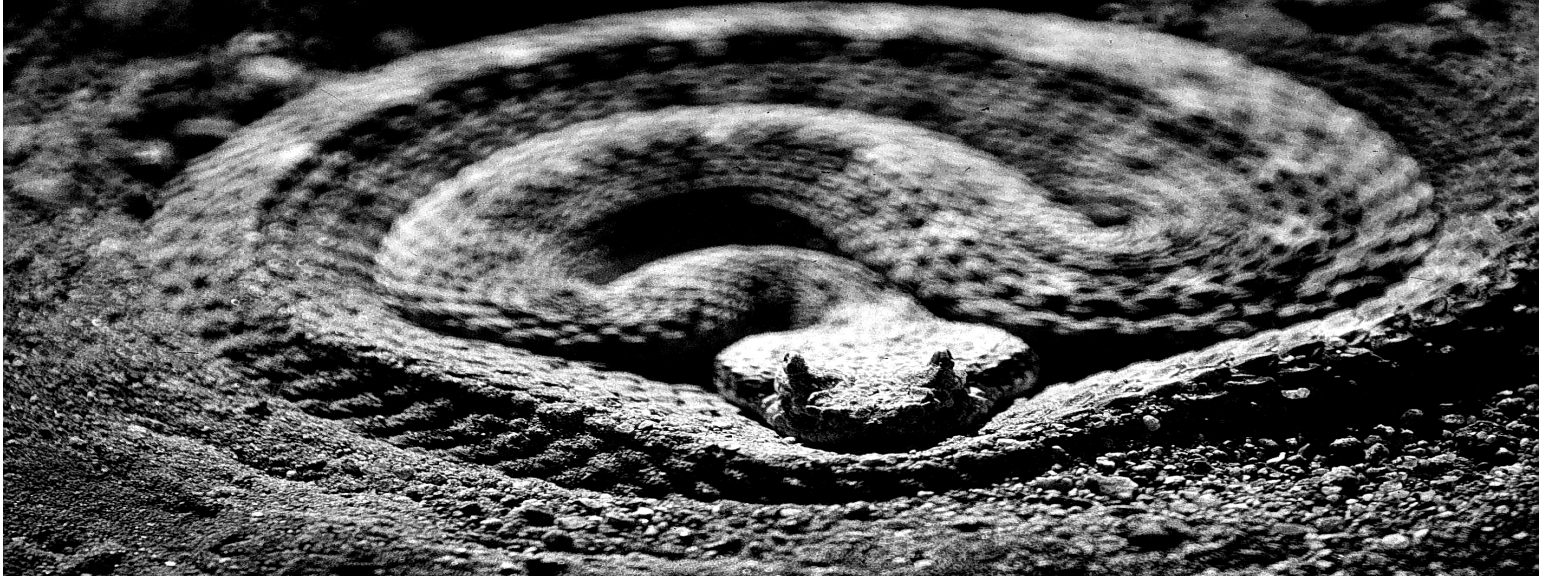




## Snakes



### Life as a Snake

As the hot desert sun fades over the horizon, the snake slowly slithers onto a rock and greedily soaks up its warmth. With warmth comes alertness and hunger. A long forked tongue flickers in the air, tasting the breeze; food is nearby. Coiling its body, the snake waits in anticipation. Suddenly, the cry of a hawk splits the stillness - danger is approaching. The snake slides off the rock into a crevice for safety. For today, the hunter lives to hunt another day. Ever present in the lives of all creatures is the circle of life.

### The Hunter and the Hunted



Patient predators of stealth and silence, snakes lie motionless for hours waiting for dinner to walk past. With intricately patterned skin, snakes are well camouflaged to blend in with the surrounding rock and vegetation, the perfect disguise to fool unsuspecting prey.

Small creatures like mice, rats, birds and lizards are on a snake's menu. Most snakes wait for prey to wander within reach and launch themselves out of hiding. Then they either swallow their prey alive or constrict it to death before eating.

Some species, such as the Sidewinder, take a more aggressive approach to hunting. They will flush prey out of the bushes and actively pursue their meal, until it is within striking distance.

Snakes are hunters, but they are also the hunted. Here at Organ Pipe Cactus eagles, hawks and roadrunners rely on snakes as their primary food source. Being cold-blooded a snake must sun itself every day to raise its body temperature high enough to function properly. During these times snakes are the most vulnerable to predators, for they are slow, sluggish and exposed in open areas.

### Senses

Snake senses are specialized to detect prey. When snakes slither out to find a hunting spot, you might see their tongue flickering in and out. Snakes use their tongue to smell. When they lick the air, tiny microscopic particles stick to their tongue and are transferred to a sensitive spot in their mouth called the Jacobson's organ. This organ sends information to the brain to identify scents as enemy, mate, or food.

In addition to smell, snakes use eyesight to spot prey. While their distance vision is not very good beyond 40 feet, closer objects are in sharp focus so a snake can easily spot potential food. If you have a chance to see a snake closeup, you may notice snakes have pupils of different shapes. Snakes with round pupils are active during the day and snakes with elliptical pupils, which capture a

lot of light, are active mostly at night.

Some snakes have special adaptations to help them hunt in the dark. Pit vipers (including rattlesnakes) have little pits below their nostrils that can sense infrared thermal radiation and help the snake detect warm-blooded prey. These heat-sensing pits are so sensitive a pit viper can hunt in total darkness, effectively "seeing" its prey in the infrared.

Can snakes hear? If you look at a snake carefully, you will not be able to find ears. That's because snakes do not have outer ears. Instead they "listen" to vibrations in the ground, which are sent by bone to the inner ear. This helps a snake detect small prey items walking in the area.

### How does Venom Work?

Snakes kill their prey using a variety of techniques, but some snakes use venom. Venom is a poison which is stored inside hollow fangs. When a snake sinks its fangs into prey, venom is released

into the victim's wound. Most small animals are immediately stunned, allowing time for the snake to swallow the victim whole. Venom also aids in digestion, quickly breaking down the tissues of the prey.

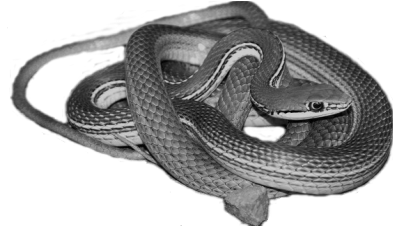
## What Snake Will I See?



### Western Patch-Nosed Snake

*Salvadora hexalepis*

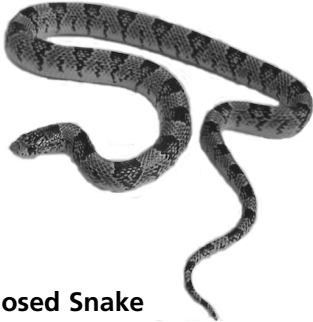
Docile and slender, this snake reaches lengths of 1-3 feet. A wide yellow stripe with a dark border runs down the center of its back. This snake uses its unique patch-like nose to burrow into the soil.



### Sonoran Whipsnake

*Masticophis bilineatus*

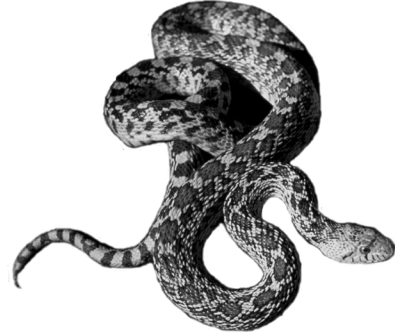
Slender in shape, this snake reaches lengths of 2-5 feet. Olive green to bluish-gray in color; this snake has 2-3 stripes running along either side of the body. This is a fast moving snake, primarily active in the early morning.



### Long-Nosed Snake

*Rhinocheilus lecontei*

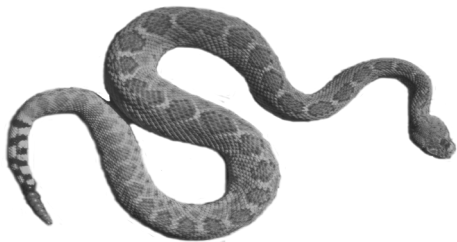
This slender snake reaches lengths of up to 3 feet. There is a bit of variation in pattern and color, most are banded or blotched with black, white and usually red. This is a snake easily confused with the venomous coral snake. It is differentiated by its long nose and body bands which do not completely encircle the body like those of a coral snake.



### Bull Snake (Gopher Snake)

*Pituophis melanoleucus*

This is a large, heavy bodied snake. It can grow up to 9 feet long, but usually only reaches lengths of 4 feet. The skin is a pale yellow or cream shade with brown or reddish blotches. A dark stripe runs from in front of the eye to the angle of the jaw. It is one of the most widespread snakes in North America and mimics a rattlesnake for protection.



### Western Diamondback Rattlesnake

*Crotalus atrox*

Exceeding lengths of 7.5 feet, this snake is the king of our southwestern desert rattlers. Its color ranges from brown to gray to pinkish, with diamond shaped blotches outlined by lighter color. Its tail is circled by several alternating black and white bands. Its head is spade shaped and it has rattles at the end of its tail.



### Sidewinder

*Crotalus cerastes*

Medium in size, this snake is a member of the rattlesnake family. It has an upturned horn-like scale above each eye. It will only reach to up to 2 ½ feet in length. It may be cream, yellowish brown, pink, or gray in color, overlaid with dorsal blotches. Getting its name from its form of motion, Sidewinders move in a s-shaped curve.

## Staying Safe

If you hear a rattle before you see a snake, STOP. That noise is the snake's "no trespassing" sign. Use your eyes to find the snake, then slowly back away.

Give the snake an opportunity to escape. A snake that is teased, cornered, or feels threatened by your presence will defend itself by striking toward you.

Do not stick your hands and feet in places that you cannot see. That is where snakes like to hide.

IF YOU ARE BITTEN:

- Remain calm. Although the bite may be painful, less than one percent of all snake bites are fatal.
- Do not run. Running will increase your heart rate

and speed the flow of toxins through the body.

- Notify Monument staff and seek medical attention immediately.
- Keep the bitten part as still as possible and below the heart. A splint or sling may keep the injured part from moving and feel more comfortable.
- Do not take aspirin, alcohol, or any other drug. Do not use incision, suction, ice, cold pack, or tourniquet as these will do more harm than good. Wait for a trained medical professional.
- Remember time of day the bite was inflicted, under what circumstances, and a description of the snake.