

# Lava Beds

National Monument

National Park Service

## The Western Rattlesnake Friend or Foe?

The Western Rattlesnake is the only rattlesnake at Lava Beds National Monument. It is a blotched rattlesnake, usually with a light stripe extending from behind the eye to the corner of its mouth. The blotches are various shades of brown to black, edged with a darker color and then with light-colored borders. The blotches frequently give way to crossbands at the rear. The ground color of this snake often harmonizes with the soil color. It may be cream, yellowish, gray, pink, greenish, brown or black.

Rattlesnakes are poisonous. The western rattlesnake has a venom more toxic than many other venomous snake species. Studies determining lethal doses for mice have found that the venom of the western rattlesnake is approximately three times more toxic than the western diamondback but three times less toxic than the coral snake. Its disposition is equally important in determining the potential danger of a venomous animal. Western rattlers are moderately aggressive, usually coiling and rattling when an intruder ventures too close. They normally give plenty of advanced warning before striking.

The western rattler is found in all habitats of the monument. Rocky outcrops, talus slopes and ledges are favorite haunts of this snake. It may den in mammal burrows, rock crevices, or caves; sometimes in large numbers. This live-bearing snake may have 1-25 young. It more often has 4-12. They are born August through October.

This rattler eats mammals (mice, ground squirrels, rabbits), nestling birds, lizards, snakes and amphibians. They are most active at night.

No one has been bitten by this rattlesnake since Lava Beds was made a national monument in 1925. Use caution when in their habitat, always looking first before placing your hands or your feet. This rattlesnake is a very important part of the ecosystem of this monument, helping to control the rodent population.

These snakes are frequently seen warming themselves on our roads before going on a hunt. PLEASE DRIVE CAREFULLY. If you see a rattler where it could be a threat to the public, PLEASE NOTIFY A RANGER.

