

LIVING WITH SNAKES

Unfortunately, snakes are the subject of much ignorance and are known to invoke hysteria in many humans. What many people don't know is that most snakes are harmless to humans and will go to great lengths to avoid us.

A snake's diet consists of small rodents such as mice, rats, and other mammals. Some will even eat other snakes.

Rattlesnakes are the only venomous snake in California. They also inhabit North and South America. While thirty species of the rattlesnake are known in California, the Northern Pacific rattlesnake is the only one indigenous to Marin County. It is a subspecies of the western rattlesnake.

If you find a rattlesnake in your yard, the first thing to do is make sure you have properly identified it. The non-venomous gopher snake is often mistaken for a rattlesnake because their defense is to act like a rattlesnake. They are basically the same size – 12 to 42 inches long – and are brown and tan. They beat their tail on the ground imitating a rattlesnake's rattle.

Rattlesnakes are heavy-bodied, with a broad triangular head that is distinctly wider than their neck. They have vertically elliptical pupils and a rattle at the end of their tails. If the rattle is not present, then it is another species of snake. When disturbed, rattlesnakes vibrate their tails.

To improve the chances of never coming face to face with a snake take the following precautions:

- Remove any food that may attract them (i.e. pet food, uncovered garbage cans).
- Since snakes primarily feed off of rodents, make your home and grounds rodent-free. Humane trapping can control rodent problems, which in turn, can control snake problems.
- Be sure to plug openings in foundations, walls, steps and porches to discourage snakes from making themselves at home in them.



- Mow lawns and fields. Since snakes cannot survive on hot, bare surfaces, remove lumber, trash, bush, rock piles and anything that might afford shade or hiding places.
- Snakes do not climb, nor do they dig, so installing a tight-fitting fence can help keep snakes off your property. However, erecting a large outdoor fence is always expensive and may not be feasible.

Snakes do not attack people and rattlesnakes will only strike in defense. The best thing to do if you discover a snake in your yard is to keep all children and pets out of the yard, away from the snake. In a few hours the snake will leave on its own accord.

If you have any questions or encounter specific problems when dealing with wildlife, please call the Marin Humane Society at 415.883.4621 or go to MarinHumaneSociety.org.

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