

The Poisonous Snakes of North Carolina

presented by Carolinas Poison Center

Call Carolinas Poison Center if you are bitten by a snake: 1-800-222-1222

Venomous vs. Poisonous: What's the difference?

The short answer is that all venomous animals are poisonous.¹ This is the reason people call poison control centers for help with bites and stings.

Venomous is a specific word indicating that an animal has a venom gland and a way to introduce the venom it produces (fangs).²

Poisonous is a more general word indicating that a substance (venom) can be harmful to a person's organs or tissues.¹

Venomous and **poisonous** are sometimes interchanged when talking about snakes with venom. While venomous is the more precise term, both terms are accurate.

How many snakes with venom live in North Carolina?

There are six snakes with venom that live in North Carolina:

- copperhead
- cottonmouth
- eastern diamondback rattlesnake
- pigmy rattlesnake
- timber rattlesnake
- coral snake rattlesnake

This poster only features the first five, however, because the coral snake is so rare in North Carolina. In fact, the Carolinas Poison Center hasn't had a call about a coral snake bite in over 20 years.

Which venomous snake is most common in North Carolina?

The copperhead is the most common venomous snake in North Carolina. The Carolinas Poison Center receives 10 times the number of calls about copperhead bites than all other snake bites combined.

Why call Carolinas Poison Center for a snake bite?

Carolinas Poison Center is the poison control center serving all of North Carolina. Here's why you should call us:

- Snake bites are poisonings, and treating poisonings is our job.
- Nurses, doctors, and pharmacists (specialists) handle the calls.
- Our specialists have years of experience and training managing snake bites.
- Other doctors and nurses call us to help treat their snake-bitten patients.

To order a free snake pack from Carolinas Poison Center, visit www.PoisonShop.org

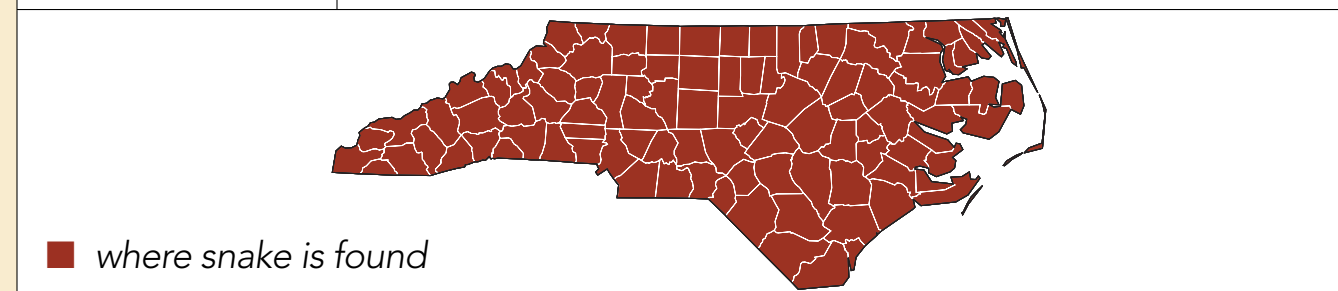
For more information about snake identification, visit www.herpsofnc.org.



Copperhead

Agkistrodon contortrix

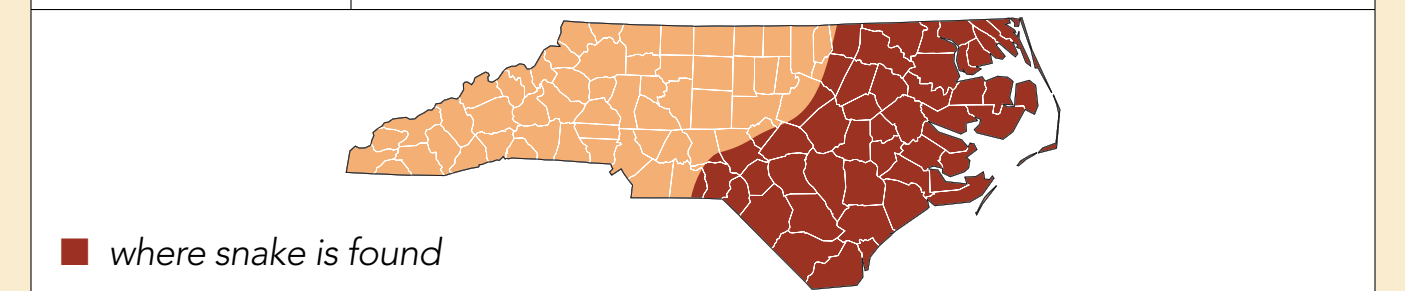
Characteristics	dark brown, hour-glass shaped pattern Young copperheads have yellow or green tails.
Typical adult length	2-3 feet
Habitat	everywhere
Defenses	camouflaging, vibrating the tail, releasing musk, biting
Bite severity	Copperhead bites can be severe but generally not as bad as other North Carolina snakes. About half of all copperhead bites result in only mild swelling and pain.



Cottonmouth also known as a Water Moccasin

Agkistrodon piscivorus

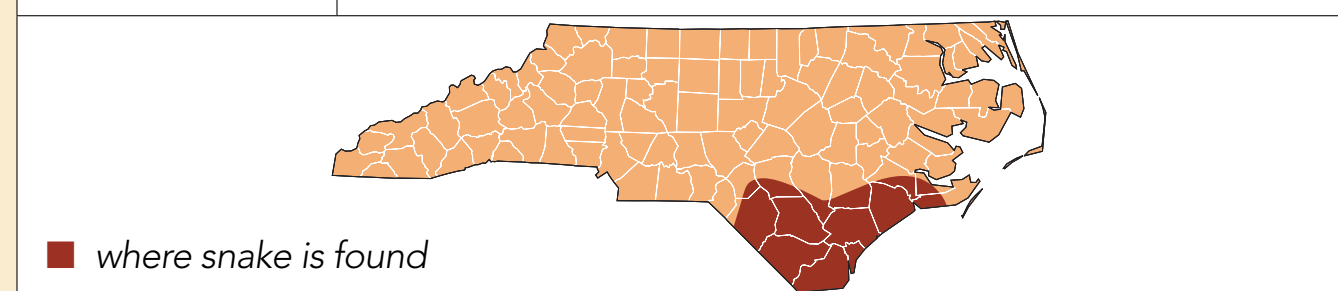
Characteristics	dark bands on dark or olive skin, white inside of mouth Young cottonmouths are lighter and look similar to copperheads.
Typical adult length	3 feet
Habitat	prefers freshwater but can also be found on land
Defenses	camouflaging, fleeing, opening the mouth widely, flattening the body to appear bigger, vibrating the tail, releasing musk, biting
Bite severity	Cottonmouth bites have about the same level of severity as copperhead bites.



Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake

Crotalus adamanteus

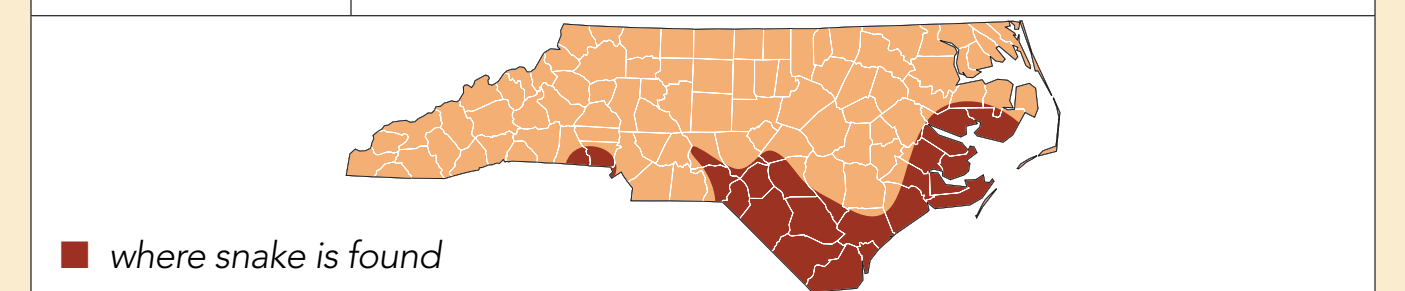
Characteristics	dark diamond pattern outlined in black on gray or yellowish skin, rattle
Typical adult length	4-5 feet
Habitat	sandy, coastal areas
Defenses	camouflaging, fleeing, rattling their tail (sometimes)
Bite severity	Bites from rattlesnakes are usually more severe than bites from copperheads and are a medical emergency.



Pigmy Rattlesnake

Sistrurus miliarius

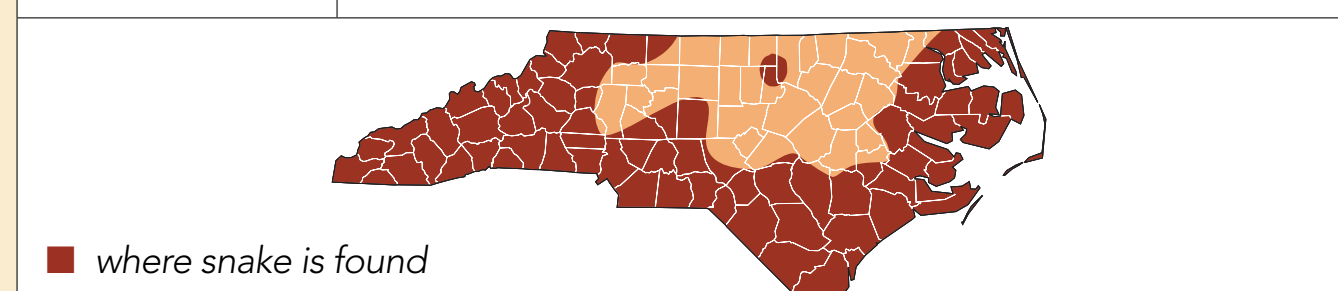
Characteristics	dark spotted pattern on gray, pinkish or red skin, rattle
Typical adult length	1-2 feet
Habitat	forests
Defenses	camouflaging, rattling their tail (sometimes), which sounds like a buzz
Bite severity	Bites from rattlesnakes are usually more severe than bites from copperheads and are a medical emergency.



Timber Rattlesnake also known as a Canebrake

Crotalus horridus

Characteristics	rattle, varies in color, dark bands on a lighter skin Coastal varieties have a brown or orange "racing stripe"
Typical adult length	4 feet
Habitat	forests
Defenses	camouflaging, rattling their tail (sometimes)
Bite severity	Bites from rattlesnakes are usually more severe than bites from copperheads and are a medical emergency.



Common Non-venomous Snakes

It's safest to consider all snakes as potentially dangerous.



Adult Rat Snake

Juvenile Rat Snake



Brown Snake

Eastern Garter Snake



Eastern Kingsnake

Banded Watersnake

Some snakes may be lighter or darker than the pictures shown.



Carolinas HealthCare System

Call Carolinas Poison Center anytime for help with snake bites:
1-800-222-1222.

Program the number into your phone for quick and easy access.

Maps and snake pictures not credited courtesy of Davidson College Herpetology Lab. Non-venomous snake pictures by J.D. Wilson. Carolinas Poison Center would like to credit the following resource for aiding in the content development of this poster: Dorcas, Michael E. A Guide to the Snakes of North Carolina. Charlotte: Belk Printing, 2004. ¹ Russell, Findlay E. Snake Venom Poisoning. New York: Scholium International, Inc., 1980. ² White, Julian and Richard Dart. Snakebite A Brief Medical Guide. Lancaster, PA: Cadmus, 2008.