



# Venomous Snake I.D. Cards

The Department of Defense Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (DoD PARC) network developed this collection of snake identification cards for the 12 most common venomous snakes on military lands in the continental U.S. The purpose of these cards is to assist military and civilian personnel with the identification of venomous snakes while training or working outdoors. For more information on snake safety and distribution on Department of Defense lands, scan the QR codes below.

Snake Safety  
Video



DoD  
Herpetofaunal  
Biodiversity



## **Characteristics of Venomous Snakes in the U.S.**

### **Copperhead, Cottonmouth, Rattlesnakes**

- Head significantly broader than the neck
- Heat sensing pit located between and below the nostril and eye on either side of the head
- Pupils are vertically elliptical or “cat like” in bright light and round in low light
- Hollow, retractable fangs
- Keeled scales (a ridge in the center of each scale)
- Rattlesnakes – a rattle located on the end of the tail



### **Coralsnakes**

- Body pattern consists of repeating bands of three colors (red, yellow, black) which completely encircle the body
- Tail lacks red color banding
- Front of head is colored black

Please note that these are generalized characteristics and that some exceptions may apply.

## Copperhead

- Beige, tan, or light yellow in color
- Brown crossbands usually hourglass-shaped (wider on the sides and narrow on the top)
- Heads are often an orange-brown or copper color
- Tail tapers to a fine point (juveniles have a yellow or yellow-green tail tip)
- Up to 22-36 inches in total length



Picture: Chris Petersen

Venomous



Pictures by: Seth Berry



Travis W. Taggart, Sternberg Museum of Natural History,  
Fort Hays State University

Distribution  
of  
Copperheads



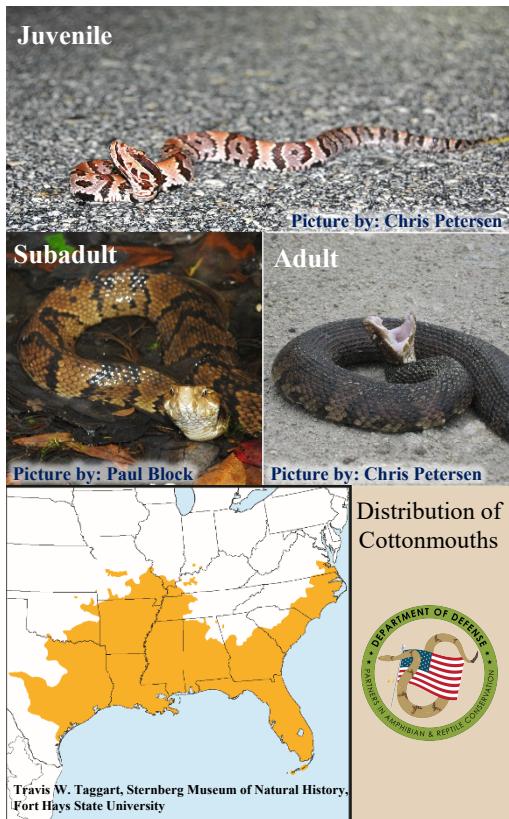
## Cottonmouth

- Olive, brown, or black with numerous crossbands with dark borders and light centers
- More solid coloration as adults
- Broad stripe on side of head, usually bordered above and below by narrow white lines
- Tail tapers to a fine point (juveniles have a yellow/yellow-green tail tip)
- Up to 20-48 inches in total length



Picture by: Chris Petersen

Venomous



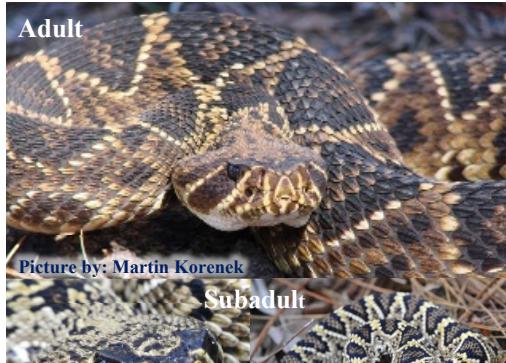
## Eastern Diamond-backed Rattlesnake

- Tan, brown or almost black with dark brown or black diamond-shaped marks with a light border along the back
- Dark facial mask from eyes to mouth bordered by lighter stripes; a dark band, bordered by light stripes, extends downwards and backwards from each eye
- Tail is black with rattle on tip
- Up to 33-72 inches in total length (excluding the rattle)



Picture by: Martin Korenek

Venomous



Distribution  
of Eastern  
Diamond-  
backed  
Rattlesnakes



## Timber Rattlesnake

- Tan, brown, gray, yellow to pinkish with dark wavy cross-bands (chevrons) going to blotches at the back of the body
- Some snakes are all black in color
- Regional variation: orange-rust stripe is present along the spine of the back
- Tail is black and has a rattle
- Up to 30-60 inches in total length (excluding the rattle)



Picture by: Tamara Conkle

Venomous



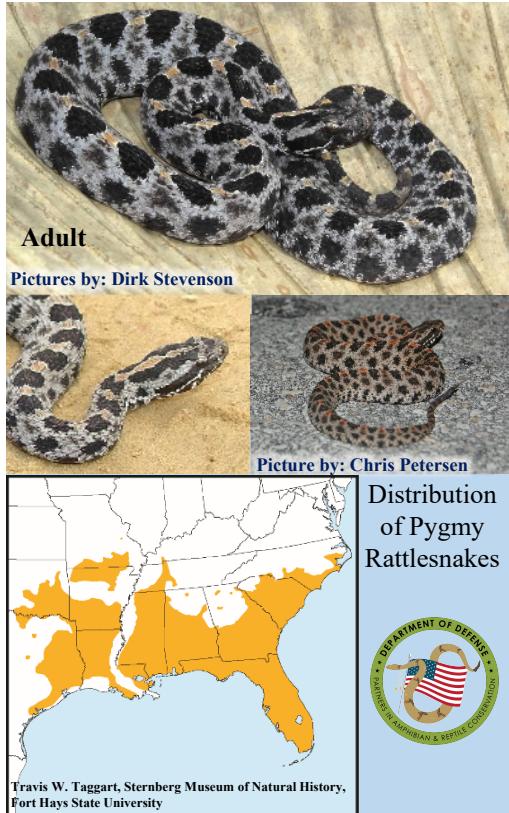
## Pygmy Rattlesnake

- Tan to light gray (sometimes reddish); 1-3 rows of dark spots along the side of the body
- Dark-brown or black blotches, often separated by a reddish-brown stripe, are present along the back
- Dark bands extend from each eye to the corner of the mouth
- Tail slender with tiny rattle seldom heard
- Up to 15-21 inches in total length (excluding the rattle)



Picture by: Dirk Stevenson

Venomous



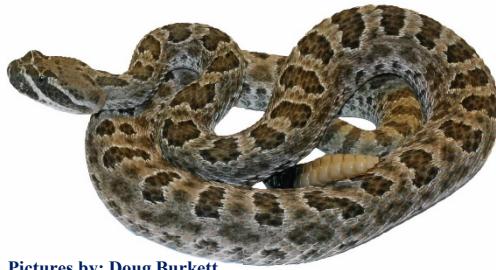
## Prairie Rattlesnake

- Green or greenish hue on gray or brown, or light brown and yellow
- Dark blotches, sometimes with light-colored borders, along the back
- Two rows of small blotches line sides of body
- Head markings include lines extending from each eye to the corner of the mouth
- Up to 35-45 inches in total length (excluding the rattle)



Picture by: Dirk Stevenson

Venomous



Pictures by: Doug Burkett



Picture by: J.D. Willson



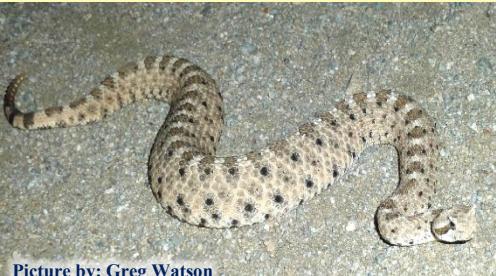
Travis W. Taggart, Sternberg Museum of Natural History  
Fort Hays State University

Distribution  
of Prairie  
Rattlesnakes



## Sidewinder

- Cream, pink, tan, or gray with blotches that are darker grayish, yellowish brown, or tan along the back
- Three rows of dark spots on sides of body
- Dark stripe extends from each eye to the mouth
- Pointed, horn-like projections are present over each eye
- Sideways, S-shaped curve body movements
- Up to 17-33 inches in total length (excluding the rattle)



Picture by: Greg Watson

Venomous



Picture by: J.D. Willson



Picture by: Greg Watson



Travis W. Taggart, Sternberg  
Museum of Natural History,  
Fort Hays State University

Distribution  
of  
Sidewinders



## Mohave Rattlesnake

- Green or greenish hue on gray or brown, or light brown and yellow with well-defined blotches or diamonds that are dark gray to brown and have a light border
- A dark, light-bordered stripe, extends from each eye to behind the corner of the mouth
- Tail has alternating light and dark rings, and typically dark rings are smaller than light rings
- Up to 24-51 inches in total length (excluding the rattle)



Picture by: Greg Watson

Venomous



Travis W. Taggart, Sternberg  
Museum of Natural History,  
Fort Hays State University

### Distribution of Mohave Rattlesnakes



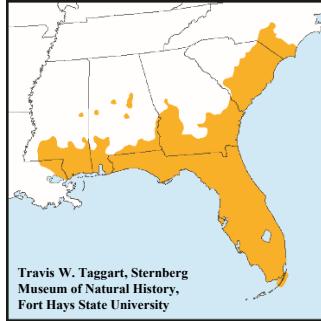
## Harlequin Coralsnake

- Series of wide red, yellow, and black rings that continue onto the belly
- Red and yellow bands lie beside each other; red bands may be dotted or spotted with black marks
- Snout tip is black, and rear of head is yellow
- Smooth scales (may be shiny in appearance)
- Highly secretive snake that spends most of its time underground
- Up to 20-30 inches in total length, some close to four feet



Picture by: J.D. Willson

Venomous



Distribution of  
Harlequin  
Coralsnakes



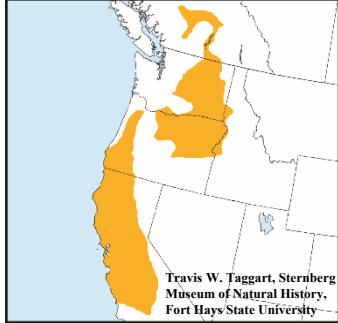
## Western Rattlesnake

- Reddish, pink, tan, yellow, dark gray, brown, olive, and occasionally all black with blotches darker than background color and sometimes edged in white
- Bands near the tail, last two tail rings and newest rattle segment are black (except in southern CA where the newest rattle segment is lighter colored)
- Head markings include lines extending from each eye to the corner of the mouth
- Up to 16-56 inches in total length (excluding the rattle)



Picture by: Matt Cage

Venomous



### Distribution of Western Rattlesnakes

## Speckled Rattlesnake

- Highly variable in color (may be consistent with color of rocks in habitats found)
- Cream, gray, yellowish, tan, pink, brown to black
- Patterned with black speckles, indistinct bands or blotches on back
- Head has dark flecks or spots
- Dark rings on the tail
- Up to 23-52 inches in total length (excluding the rattle)



Picture by: J.D. Willson

Venomous



Pictures by: Matt Cage



### Distribution of Speckled Rattlesnakes



## Western Diamond-backed Rattlesnake

- Gray, brown, pink, or yellowish
- Patterned with light brown to blackish blotches or diamonds with light-colored borderers
- Light stripes extend from in front and behind the eye to the upper lip
- Tail has alternating broad black and white or light gray rings
- Up to 30-90 inches in total length (excluding the rattle)



Picture by: Doug Burkett

Venomous

