

# Timber Rattlesnake

## Description

(35"-74") The timber rattlesnake is a heavy-bodied snake with a broad head that is distinct from its narrow neck. The top of the head is unmarked and usually yellow to light gold in color. They have a yellow, brown, rust-orange, or in rare cases gray ground color with black or dark brown crossbands extending along the back. There is a dark brown stripe behind each eye, and there may be a rust-colored middorsal stripe from the neck to the tail. The tail is short and thick, all black, and tipped with a tan rattle. Juvenile timber rattlers are marked like the adults.

## Habitat

Timber rattlesnakes can typically be found in bluff prairies and oak woodlands in relatively remote areas. They prefer rocky outcrops and open grassy areas with southerly exposures in the spring and fall. During the summer, they inhabit deciduous forests and open valleys. Rock fissures and crevices provide communal dens for overwintering.

## Habits

Timber rattlesnakes are experts at climbing along rocky ledges and scaling steep bluffs, and are also able to swim. Rattlesnakes typically crawl with the tip of their tail and rattle held perpendicular to the ground.

## Food-Habits

Timber rattlesnakes feed primarily on small mammals which include mice, voles, chipmunks, squirrels, and young rabbits. They are primarily sedentary feeders, preferring to wait for prey to come to them. They often coil alongside fallen logs (natural travel corridors for small mammals) and wait for prey to come into range. The snake's heat-sensing pits, located between the eye and the nostril on each side of the face, direct the attack; the effect of the venom allows the rodent to run only a short distance before dying. The snake follows the scent of the venom to the prey item and then swallows it whole. The venom, composed of enzymes, also helps with the digestive process.

## Other-Behaviors

Timber rattlesnakes are not a major threat to humans and livestock. This snake has a secretive nature and prefers those areas that are mostly unused by humans. Timber rattlers prefer to remain quiet, relying on their cryptic



coloration to go unnoticed. They often are reluctant to rattle, preferring not to call attention to themselves. This rattlesnake is notably docile unless provoked or unless going through a molting cycle, which impairs their vision. They can be defensive if disturbed and will bite.

## Predators

Humans are the dominant predators of adult timber rattlesnakes, although raptors, turkeys, badgers, skunks and raccoons also prey on them.

