

Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake

Crotalus adamanteus



Feared as deadly and aggressive, Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnakes are actually highly averse to human contact.

Although the diamondback's real threat to public safety is very low – many more people are killed every year by lightning strikes, bee stings and domestic dogs – the perceived threat by the public is still quite high.

Eastern diamondbacks only attack in defense, and most strikes occur when humans taunt or try to capture or kill them.

The Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake is a large, impressive, and potentially dangerous snake.

It can strike up to 2/3 its body length; a 6-foot individual may strike 4 feet. These factors, as well as others, make this a snake that should be simply left alone and not bothered.

Some people wrongly believe the Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake must rattle before striking, but this is not true. It can lay silent and motionless, and then strike without the usual nervous buzz from its rattle. In fact, Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnakes that rattle are more apt to be heard, seen and killed, and those that remain silent are more apt to go undiscovered.

Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnakes are found throughout the state of Florida, including several barrier islands and the Florida Keys.

Outside of Florida, they range north along the coastal plain to eastern South Carolina and west to southern Mississippi and eastern Louisiana.

This species usually inhabits dry sandy areas, palmetto or wiregrass flat-

woods, pine flatwoods, coastal dune habitats, or hardwood hammocks.

They generally avoid wet areas but sometimes live along the edges of swamps. These habitats contain palmetto thickets and Gopher Tortoise burrows in which the Diamondback Rattlesnake may seek refuge.

They are accomplished swimmers and can even swim through salt water to and from barrier islands.

The Eastern Diamondback rattlesnake is the largest of the 32 species of rattlesnake currently recognized. Adults are usually from three to six feet long.

The record length was 8 feet. Tales of longer snakes are urban legends. Mature snakes average 4-5 pounds, but can tip the scales at up to 10 pounds.

They are large, heavy-bodied snakes with large, broad heads a light bordered dark stripe running diagonally through the eye. The background color is brown, tan, or yellowish and covered with the namesake diamonds, which are dark brown and surrounded by lighter scales. Males are larger than females.

The young are similar to the adults in color pattern. Mating occurs in the spring and fall and females give birth

to 12 – 24 young in the late summer. Diamondbacks grow slowly, taking several years to reach maturity, and adult females only reproduce every 2-3 years. At the time of birth, the baby snakes are about 15 inches long. The snakes can live 20 years or more.

Like most large pit vipers, eastern diamondbacks spend most of their time coiled in palmetto thickets or other thick vegetation to ambush prey. Most movement between locations occurs during the day and is mostly restricted to the morning and evening in summer.

The bulk of its prey consists of rabbits and cotton rats.

Diamondbacks hunt from a tight coil, remaining motionless, waiting to ambush prey that come within striking distance. They may spend from one day, to as much as a week coiled in the same position.

The Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake is extremely beneficial to man because it preys on rats,

mice, rabbits, and other warm blooded prey, many of which are considered pests.

Nevertheless, the general public in Florida feels so threatened by this and other snakes that many are killed without consideration.

