

SNAKES IN THE RAIN

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I have noticed more people encountering snakes with the recent rain. According to Florida Wildlife Control, snakes live in underground dens which they create and heavy rains flood their homes; making it a place they would drown if they stayed. A snakes' first reaction is to get out of the ground as quickly as possible, get away from the rushing water and seek shelter in higher ground. Their shelter may be brick walls, hills, decks, large rocks, homes, outbuildings or under large piles of debris left by the storm.

IN has over 30 species of snakes; but only 3 venomous snakes call Southern IN home. IN's 3 venomous snakes have pupils that are vertical slits, are heavy-bodied, have broad, spade shaped heads that are distinctly wider than their narrow necks; and two enlarged fangs. The head of a non-venomous snake is about the same width as its body and their teeth are the same size with no fangs. Some non-venomous water snakes are stout and many snakes flatten their heads when bluffing.

The Northern Copperhead is our areas most common venomous snake. They live in high, dry, rocky areas and well forested areas dominated by oaks and hickories, but have been seen in outbuildings and barns. They have a coppery-red head and an hourglass pattern of 15 - 19 mahogany bands on their body. Irregular brown spots are often found between the bands and they are 24 - 36 inches long. Copperhead bands are narrow along the back and wide on either side. They are nocturnal, hunting at night, when they are more likely to bite. They are very secretive and do not tolerate peoples presence. The bite of this snake is extremely painful, but rarely life threatening.

The Cottonmouth Water Moccasin is restricted to a single wetland in Dubois County. They are recognized by the distinctive white lining that it displays when annoyed. The color patterns are easy to confuse with those of the northern or midland water snake, and they are 30 - 42 inches long. They are rarely seen, even by those who know exactly where they should be.

Timber Rattlesnakes are also rare, restricted to some of the forested hills in south-central IN. They live on dry, forested hillsides and hibernate in dens. Colors and patterns vary from almost black to yellow with dark blotches, and can be up to 5 feet or more long. They have a distinctive head shape and rattle at the end of the tail. A new rattle segment is added when the snake sheds its skin 1 - 2 times a year. They are not aggressive.

According to the IN DNR, venomous snake bites are very rare. Most bites occur when a person steps on the snake, tries to kill, move or pick up a snake. Never get closer than the length of a snake; as this is their striking distance. Be alert and search the area ahead of you, do not merely look down at your feet. Venomous snakes blend in with their surroundings and may be difficult to see. If you know you will be in an area known to have venomous snakes, wear high-topped, leather hiking boots. Do not reach under rocks or logs, and do not step over logs, step on them, then over. Be very careful when handling a dead snake and avoid its head. A dead snake's bite reflex remains active up to an hour or longer, meaning a dead snake can bite.

Although dangerous, according to UF Wildlife the chance of dying from a venomous snakebite in the U.S. is nearly zero. 7,000 - 8,000 people are bitten by venomous snakes in the U.S. each year; and only one in 50 million people will die from snakebite. Nationwide there are 5 - 6 fatalities annually. You are nine times more likely to die from being struck by lightning than to die of a venomous snakebite. More people die from spider bites, bees, hornets or wasps or dog attacks annually.

According to the IN Poison Center, if you are bitten you should remain calm, walk, don't run and call 911. Keep the bitten extremity at heart level; and remove any jewelry from the extremity. Look for fang

marks and cleanse if possible. DO NOT “cut and suck” the bite, DO NOT use a tourniquet and DO NOT ice the extremity. If possible note the snakes markings, color, behavior and habitat, but do not attempt to capture or kill the snake.

Snakes are not out to get us; and will seek a way to escape. When a person is bitten, it is usually in self-defense because they have intruded into the snakes’ space and the snake had no way to escape. If given the opportunity snakes will almost always try to escape, preferring to flee rather than striking; unless they are harassed or startled. If you leave a snake alone, it will leave you alone.