

BE CAREFUL OF THOSE CREEPY CRAWLY SLITHERING CREATURES—THE SNAKES

With all this hot humid weather, our creepy crawly friends the snakes have been making their way into our world. However, I think it is the other way around. We are making our way into their world—the great outdoors. We generally cross paths when we're doing some sort of activity outside like cutting grass, playing in the garden, trimming the hedges, or just taking a casual walk. When the average person meets a snake, it clearly brings the attitude that there is nothing good about a snake unless he is a dead snake. It is my hope that in this week's article, you can change your attitude and learn some important facts about snakes so that we can coexist.

We have to be careful about how we treat snakes. A lot of people will read this column and say, "Yeah right, Monte, but they are over 40 non-venomous snakes that very beneficial to our environment." One in particular is the Eastern King Snake. Eastern King Snakes are black with light yellow or whitish cross bands. The belly is a combination of black and yellow. This king snake feeds on snakes (including venomous species), lizards, rodents, birds, and eggs—even eggs scavenged from turtle nests. So please do not kill or harm the Eastern King Snakes; they are our friends. As for the venomous species snakes, there are only six different species in Georgia: the Cotton Mouth/Water Moccasin, the Timber Rattler, the Eastern Diamond Back, the Copperhead, the Pygmy Rattler, and the Coral Snake. All of these are venomous, so proceed with caution. You are probably wondering how you can you tell or know the difference between a venomous and non-venomous snake. To me it is quite simple. Venomous snakes are pit vipers and have pits located beside their eye. They also have a triangle-shaped head. Secondly, the pupils of venomous snakes are elliptical, and four out of six species of venomous snakes will have a rattler on the end of the tail. As for non-venomous snakes, a tell-tell sign is that they have round pupils and a rounded head.

When you do come across a snake in your yard or around your home, please be cautious. Please follow these important steps into making sure that we and the snakes coexist without you or your family getting injured in the process.

1. Determine if the snake is poisonous or nonpoisonous. If you can't, please call someone to help you make that distinction.
2. If it's nonpoisonous, leave it alone. It will generally find its way to back into the woods.

3. If it's poisonous, please call 911 or a professional wildlife removal service company to help you relocate or potentially terminate your wanted guest.
4. Snakes are more afraid of you and generally want to be left alone, so please don't try to handle them. That's when people get bitten.
5. Remove all debris (junk, wood piles and unwanted items) that can provide a habitat for snakes.

Snakes are very interesting creatures, but I hope that we learn to appreciate that they are needed and we have to coexist with one another. Be careful, but let's be smart as well. **If you would like more information about snakes, please don't hesitate to call me at (706) 769-3946 or stop by the Oconee County Extension Office at 23 Water Street, Watkinsville, GA.**