



CO-EXIST SAFELY WITH RATTLESNAKES ON THE AUGUST LONG WEEKEND

A message from the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake Recovery Team

Monday, July 26, 2010, Toronto, Ontario: The Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake is a very important element of Ontario's natural world. Unfortunately, there is a lot of misunderstanding surrounding this species and as a result it has become "Threatened" with extinction in Canada and is legally protected. It is our hope that people who have been educated about rattlesnakes will choose to co-exist with them as they do with other wildlife near their homes and cottages. The continued presence of rattlesnakes is a reflection of the health of natural habitats that remain in Ontario.

Snake encounters increase during July and August, as the number of people visiting the Georgian Bay area see an increase. The higher temperatures also make it more suitable for snakes to be out and about. The key to co-existence with this species is learning how to prevent being bitten. A relatively shy snake, they rely on their camouflage pattern and will often hide from view to avoid being detected. They will only strike when threatened. Many bites occur as a result of people engaging in risky behaviour such as trying to capture the rattlesnake. From 2002 to 2010, there has been an average of only 6 bites per year.

How can I avoid snakebite?

- Do not pick up snakes or other wild animals. This is the most common cause of snakebites. Do not harass, chase or threaten a snake, the second most common cause of snakebites. It is illegal due to its protected status.
- Stay on the beaten path when walking in rattlesnake habitat and use a flashlight at night.
- Always wear close toed boots or shoes when hiking. The Massasauga has relatively small fangs that are not likely to penetrate leather-hiking boots or loose clothing.
- Always watch where you put your hands and feet, do not reach into areas where you cannot see.
- If you hear a rattlesnake, stop moving and determine the snake's location. Slowly step away and give the snake room to move away.
- Protect your pets - keep dogs on a leash when walking through rattlesnake habitat.

What do I do if I get bitten?

- Don't panic! Not all bites result in venom being injected. 25% of all rattlesnake bites are "dry" bites. Stay calm and reduce movement. Clean the wound. Remove jewellery on the affected limb.
- Call emergency services (911) and get to a hospital as quickly and safely as possible.
- **DO NOT** apply ice or a tourniquet, and **DO NOT** cut or apply suction to the bite area.

Is there a shortage of antivenom in Ontario?

No. A provincial depot system created in 2010 is funded by the Ministry of Health to ensure adequate supplies of antivenom are centrally managed and stock is appropriately distributed to hospitals treating rattlesnake bites within the province. In the event of a shortfall, the Toronto Zoo has access to additional supplies through the Association of Zoos and Aquariums Antivenom Index.

An informative website, prepared by the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake Recovery Team, can be found at www.massasauga.ca. Seeing a Massasauga in the wild is a unique and very special life experience - Enjoy it safely!

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Current Zoo Hours to Sept. 6 – 9:00am to 7:30 pm. Last admissions one hour before closing. General Admission 13-64 incl. is \$23, Children 3 and under are free, Children 4-12 are \$13 and Seniors 65+ are \$17. Parking is \$10. Prices, which include applicable taxes, and all events are subject to change without notice. The Zoo is located at Meadowvale Road and Hwy. 401, Exit 389 east and west bound. For general information, call (416) 392 5929. The Toronto Zoo is open year round except December 25.