



A Western diamondback rattlesnake

Image courtesy of Texas Wide Open Spaces



A Western diamondback rattlesnake den and her hatchlings

Image courtesy of Arizona Game and Fish

Front cover:

Western diamondback rattlesnake
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FORT SELDEN

HISTORIC SITE

WESTERN DIAMONDBACK RATTLESNAKE



At about 250,000 square miles, the Chihuahuan Desert covers a large portion of North America from Northern Mexico through the Southwestern United States. It is home to around 1,000 different species of animals. Each of these animals have specific characteristics that help it survive in the desert environment.

In this brochure, learn about the Western diamondback rattlesnake, one species found in the Chihuahuan Desert.

Be sure to respect the rattlesnake's right to privacy while at Fort Selden and stay on the trails!

Physical Characteristics

These snakes have a heavy body and a large triangular-shaped head. Their colors can vary from brown to pale green and they have a dark diamond pattering along their back. Their tails are black and white stripped just before the rattles. They can grow to be 3-7 feet long.

Diet

Rattlesnakes eat a diet of lizards, toads, birds, rabbits, and small rodents.

Habitat

These snakes aren't picky about where they live. They can be found in New Mexico, Arizona, Oklahoma, Texas, and northern Mexico. They live in rocky areas or in underground burrows of other animals. They are mostly active at night but do come out on cooler days. The diamondback rattlesnake enjoys resting underneath desert plants and on grassy plains. In the winter they go into caves or other places to hibernate.

Senses

The snakes have a heat sensor located behind each nostril that can tell differences in temperature. This skill helps them decide whether other animals are predators or prey.

Predators

Eagles, hawks, roadrunners, king snakes, coyote, bobcats, and foxes all eat rattlesnakes.

Interesting Facts

- Hearing a rattling sound in the desert means a rattlesnake is close by and you are in danger. This sound comes from the rattlesnake's tail which is made of keratin, the same material your fingernails are made of! This material sits in layers on the tail and knocks against itself to produce a rattling sound when the snake vibrates its tail. A snake can rattle back and forth up to 90 times per second!

- Rattlesnakes have been evolving over time. They don't always rattle as a warning to potential threats.

- As the body of the snake grows, the skin does not grow with the body so the snake grows new skin that fits better. The rattlesnake sheds its skin 2 to 3 times a year. The snake begins the process of shedding its skin by rubbing its face against rough surfaces such as a rock. The snake continues to do this until the outer layer of skin is torn open. Once the skin is torn open, the snake ripples the muscles of its body to stretch the skin and begin to wiggle out of it. The skin is usually shed in one piece. Every time the snake sheds its skin a newly added segment of rattle can be seen on the snake!

- The body temperature of a rattlesnake can determine how dangerous it is. When a snake has a cooler body temperature, the rattling from their tails become slower and farther apart. The warmer the snake the faster the rattle will sound, the more venom it has, and the faster it can strike, making it more dangerous.

- Keep your distance as this rattlesnake has what is considered to be one of the most potent venoms in North America and these snakes have a reputation for being aggressive toward people and will defend themselves if they feel they are being threatened.

- Each year in the United States 7,000 to 8,000 people are bitten by venomous snakes.

- Rattlesnakes are ovoviviparous, which means that they produce eggs but the eggs hatch in the mothers body, and therefore result in live birth of the young. They can have up to 25 babies (called 'neonates') in a brood.

- The rattlesnake can survive 2 years without eating.

- Western diamondback rattlesnakes have been known to swim through water or climb a short distance into a tree when necessary to pursue prey.

- Western diamondback rattlesnakes are also referred to as adobe snakes, desert diamond-backs, fierce rattlesnakes, spitting rattlesnakes and the Texan rattlesnake.

- If you do get bitten by a rattlesnake, follow these steps: 1) Remain calm. This will decrease the spread of the venom. 2) Call 911 or get to the hospital as soon as possible. 3) Do not elevate the spot that was bitten. 4) Clean the wound with soap and water and wrap it with a bandage.

- Rattlesnakes don't jump, they strike. And when they strike, they can strike from 1/3 to 1/2 their body length.