# MAFES Dawg Tracks

*June 3, 2013*

*Safety Tips: Snakes Alive! Identity & Protection*

My "Papa T" referred to snakes as the "Shoulderless Men." Personally, I don't even mention the name or look at photos of them. But it is necessary to talk about them periodically to keep our awareness of the perils that can be caused by them.

Snakes could be referred to as one of the "Police of Nature" because they do control rats, insects and snakes. According to the "experts," the chance of getting bitten by a poisonous snake is lower than getting hit by lightning. However, if you are like me and many others, you want to take as many precautions as possible to avoid all of them.

Following are some tips that will help in reducing this potential natural hazard:

- ✓ Clean up idle refuse and debris as well as other hiding spots around your property.
- ✓ Wear boots and long pants in thick grassy and wooded areas.
- ✓ Watch and walk carefully in the areas where snakes will rest and are nesting.

Most poisonous snakes in the U.S. are in the pit viper family and can be identified by the following characteristics:

- o Pits on the head — Vertical pupils
- o A triangular head — Slim neck
- o A heavy body with a single row of scales on the underside of its tail.

The pit viper group is made up of the copperhead and cottonmouth and 2 major categories of rattlesnakes. All the pit vipers vibrate their tails rapidly to make noise when they are threatened. Cottonmouths and copperheads are often referred to as moccasins, but they are 2 distinct categories within the pit viper group.

Following are some characteristics of the ones we might see here in Mississippi:

**Rattlesnakes** – There are many varieties that have pit viper characteristics:

- Button on their tail plus 2-4 segments of rattles each year.
- Sizes range from 15 to 72 inches long.
- The record is 96 inches on an Eastern Diamondback.

**Copperheads** – There are 5 categories of copperheads that have pit viper characteristics:

- Bands of brown, copper or red on a tan body.
- Sizes range from 20 to 36 inches in length.
- Regional differences are identified by color and size.
- All have a bright yellow tip on their tail.
- The largest copperhead seen was 56 inches long.

**Cottonmouth** – The cottonmouth is semi-aquatic, with the pit viper characteristics:

- Adults have a solid-colored upper body that is olive, brown, or black with a lighter colored underside.
- Sometimes it's hard to differentiate between a cottonmouth and a non-poisonous water snake.
- Water snakes will leave when threatened while cottonmouths will raise their heads and confront their enemy with their fangs showing inside a cotton-white mouth.
- Sizes range for cottonmouths from 30 to 48 inches.
- The largest on record is74 inches.

In south Mississippi you can find coral snakes which have:

- Distinct markings of red and black stripes, separated by yellow.
- Are sometimes confused with the non-venomous scarlet king snake, which has yellow bands with red and black bands together.
- Have oval heads and round pupils - unlike vipers.
- Have a very toxic venom, but aren't very aggressive.

According to the snake "gurus," very few snakes are aggressive. Even when a cottonmouth is swimming toward you, it is more curiosity than aggression. They also state that snakes can only strike within 2/3rds of the length of their body, so a 3-foot snake could reach about 2 feet away.

***IDENTIFYING SNAKE BITES-***

If you are bitten by a snake (hope you never are) you should be familiar with what type of bite it is.

- Venomous snakes will leave 2 distinct puncture wounds.
- Non-venomous may leave marks that resemble scratch marks.

***IN CASE OF A BITE-***

If you are bitten by a venomous snake:

~Get to a hospital as quickly as possible.

~If there is a delay in getting to a hospital, wrap a constricting band between the bite and the heart to slow down the blood flow but not so tight as to cut off the flow completely.

~Do not apply a tourniquet.

~Your best alternative is to rush to the hospital, if possible, than to waste time with first aid.

~With dogs and other pets, try to get them to a veterinary clinic ASAP.

~Be extra careful with small snakes as they are harder to identify than the adults and usually will inject more venom.

***OTHER PRECAUTIONS, IN CASE OF BITE-***

- ✓ If the snake is still in the area, don't try to kill or catch it, unless it poses a danger to you or a victim. Try to remember what it looks like so you can help identify it from pictures in the emergency room.
- ✓ Remove all items that may restrict circulation, such as jewelry, gloves or shoes that could be a problem as the bite begins to swell.
- ✓ Immobilize the area as much as possible and keep the bite slightly below level of the head.
- ✓ If swelling occurs, place a 1-inch constricting band 2 inches above the bite. The tension should be so that you can slip a finger under it.

***DON'T:***

- Give the victim food or (obviously-no alcohol) drink.
- Place the bite in ice.
- Make any cuts or attempt to suck out the venom.
- Attempt to administer or give ant-venom.
- Administer pain or anti-anxiety medications.

**For help- Call the Regional Poison Control Ctr:**

**@ (601) 354-7660**

***SAFETY IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY~***

****** **** ******

***IF YOU SEE A SNAKE- KILL IT!***

***DON'T WAIT FOR A COMMITTEE!***

*Ted Gordon-Risk Mgmt. /Loss Control Mgr.*
*MAFES/MSU-ES (662) 566-2201*
*Excerpts: www.wildlife mgt.com*
*1/31/2013*