

Snakes of the West Point Military Reservation

West Point Military Reservation is home to more species of snake than most areas in the state. Of the 14 species present at West Point **only 2 are venomous**. This brochure will help those who may encounter snakes to identify them correctly. We hope this will lead to less fear and better decision-making regarding the mediation between human welfare and the conservation of these reptiles.

This brochure is not a comprehensive guide. Five of the 14 species are not described or illustrated herein: Smooth Green, Redbelly, Ribbon, Ringneck, and Worm Snakes; all are **non-venomous** and small, generally under 2.5ft. in total length.

Eastern Milk Snake (*Lampropeltis triangulum*)



This medium (2-3ft.), **non-venomous** snake is commonly mistaken for the venomous Copperhead. The Milk Snake is generally more slender than the Copperhead, with a “Y” or “V” shaped mark on the back of the head. Another characteristic that sets Milk Snakes apart from Copperheads is the darker portion of Milk Snake coloration is wider than the lighter background color, the opposite of Copperhead color pattern.

Northern Copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix*)



The Copperhead is a medium sized (2-3ft.), **venomous** snake usually found in dry, rocky areas. The Copperhead is a shy species, but will bite if harassed or handled. Bites are not considered life threatening, but are painful with localized swelling and tissue damage. The Copperhead’s diet is mainly rodents, but may also include amphibians, reptiles and insects.

Timber Rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*)



The Timber Rattlesnake is a large (3-5ft.), **venomous** species most commonly found in forested, mountain regions. Its most distinctive feature is the rattle; however, the sound of a snake rattling is not necessarily a Rattlesnake. Other species may mimic Rattlesnakes by vibrating their tails against the ground. Remember that the rattle is diagnostic, but the sound is not. Rattlesnake venom is highly toxic and severe bites, although rare, can be fatal. The Timber Rattlesnake is a threatened species in New York State. Killing a Rattlesnake or disturbing den-sites is a punishable offense. All sightings should be reported to Natural Resources, ext. 3857.

Eastern Hognose Snake (*Heterodon platirhinos*)



The Hognose is a short and stocky snake up to 3 feet long. It is best known for its repertoire of defensive behaviors. When threatened, this snake will hiss loudly, flatten its head and open its mouth wide. If these behaviors fail to dissuade an impending threat, a last resort is to “play dead” by rolling over on to its back, remaining motionless until the threat is gone. This display is only a bluff as Hognose snakes rarely bite and are **non-venomous**. The Hognose’s color and pattern are variable, from brownish, spotted snakes (sometimes mistaken for Copperheads) to those completely black in color. This species is rare in NY and all sightings should be reported to Natural Resources, ext. 3857.



Northern Brown Snake (*Storeria dekayi*)



A small (10-12in.), brown snake common around trash and other debris. Can be distinguished from the similar Redbelly Snake by its white belly. This **non-venomous** snake feeds mostly on insects, worms and slugs.

Black Racer (juv.) (*Coluber constrictor*)



The Racer is a large (3-5ft.), agile snake. Adult snakes are all black and resemble another local snake, the Black Rat snake. Two features can help differentiate them; Racers have smooth, glossy scales and a patch of white on the chin and throat. (see below for Black Rat snake) Although the Racer is **non-venomous**, it will bite viciously if handled. Racers frequent warm, sunny locations where they feed on rodents, amphibians and reptiles.

Black Rat Snake (*Elaphe obsoleta*)



Our longest snake, reaching record lengths of 8ft., but more commonly 4-6 ft. Very similar to the Black Racer (above) in appearance, the Black Rat has a white underside for most of its length. This **non-venomous** snake is common on rocky ridges and wooded slopes, but also where food is abundant. Their diet is composed mainly of rodents, birds, and eggs.

Northern Water Snake (juv.) (*Nerodia sipedon*)



Water Snakes reach lengths up to 3.5 ft. and, as their name implies, are frequently found in and around lakes, ponds, and streams. Identification can be difficult as the pattern and coloration of adults often fades to dark brown. This **non-venomous** species is frequently killed, being mistaken for Water Moccasins, which are not found in NY.

Eastern Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*)



The Garter snake is perhaps the most familiar snake in the U.S. It is often found around water and human habitation. It is a small to medium (1.5-2.5 ft.), **non-venomous** snake. A Garter Snakes diet includes insects, worms, amphibians, and fish.