

Northern Pacific Rattlesnake

Crotalus oreganus

Reptile

Scientific Name

Crotalus oreganus

Other Names

Western Rattlesnake, Hopi Rattlesnake

Range

Central northern California, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia and into Idaho

Habitat

Montane forests, grasslands, mixed woodlands and sagebrush

Average Size

Length: 15 – 48 in.
Weight: 5 lbs.

Description

A heavy-bodied snake with a triangular head and rattle at the end of the tail. Background is olive, green, gray, brown or tan with darker dorsal blotches.

Lifespan

In the wild: Estimated at 10 years
In captivity: 20 – 30 years

Diet

In the wild: Small mammals, birds, lizards, amphibians
In captivity: Mice and rats

Gestation

90 – 110 days

Sexual Maturity

3 years

Offspring

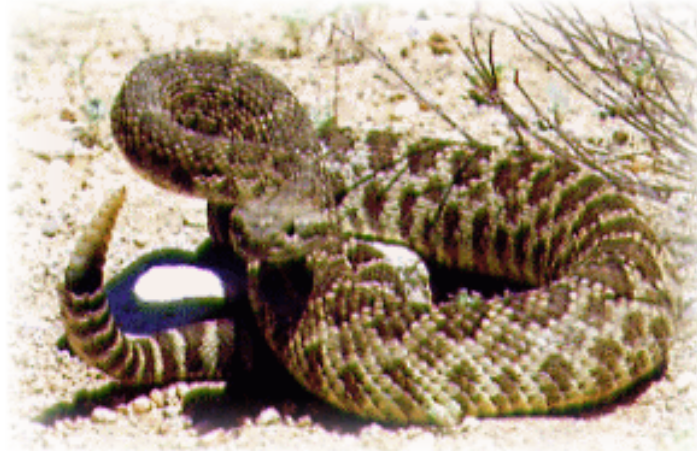
4 – 25 live young

Predators

Birds of prey and carnivores

Population Status

Stable



Behavior

Generally active from April to September, this rattlesnake species is varied in its preferred time of day. During periods of excessive heat, they are nocturnal and crepuscular, but in moderate temperatures they are diurnal. In winter, they den for a few months in burrows, caves or rocky crevices with other rattlesnakes and other snake species.

Although they are excellent hunters able to pick up the scent of prey from far distances, they often ambush prey by lying in wait near heavily traveled game trails. When prey is located, the snake strikes quickly to inject venom and then releases the animal, to later track it down with heat pits and tongue to swallow it whole. The Northern Pacific Rattlesnake is able to control the amount of venom it releases depending upon the prey found.

When alarmed, this snake shakes its tail rapidly back and forth, rubbing the rattle segments together and producing a loud, unmistakable buzzing sound.

Reproduction and Breeding

Like many snakes, scent plays a large role in finding a mate for the Northern Pacific rattlesnake. Although some mating may occur in spring after emerging from hibernation, most breeding is in late summer.

The live young (ovoviviparous) are born from August to October, without rattles but just as toxic as the adults. Neither parent plays a role in providing care to their offspring, but the young may remain in the general area to receive localized protection from predators.

Conservation

The Northern Pacific Rattlesnake is not listed as threatened at this time, but they are faced with increasing destruction of habitat and loss of prey. Because of their reputation, they are killed in great numbers as a perceived threat to pet and human lives. Although the bite of this species is rarely fatal if medical assistance is received, they are removed from many areas of new housing developments at an alarming rate.

This species, as well as all snakes, are necessary predators in the control of rodent populations, that when allowed to become overabundant, pose a much greater threat to human health.



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Amazing Facts

The fangs are just like other teeth and can be replaced if broken.

Adult California ground squirrels are immune to rattlesnake venom and will actively engage them.

The rattle sound is so universal, many other snakes mimic the characteristic noise in an attempt to remain predator free.

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