

—THE—
OKLAHOMA STATE PARKS

SNAKE MYTHS

AN INTERPRETIVE FIELD GUIDE TO IDENTIFYING
COMMON SNAKE MYTHS IN OKLAHOMA



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SNAKES ON THE PLAINS
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Before You Hit The Trail ...



Each year, thousands of hikers, campers, and wildlife enthusiasts visit Oklahoma's state parks — and many bring questions (or fears) about snakes.

This guide was created by our interpretive team to help separate myth from fact & promote respectful, and safe experiences in our parks.

Inside, you'll find:

- Common myths we hear in the parks
- Real photos & field notes
- Side-by-side ID comparisons

Insight from naturalists & wildlife photographers!

Our goal?

To *replace fear with understanding* — and help you stay curious, confident, and snake-smart on the trails.

Save this guide. Share it. Bust the myths.



OKLAHOMA
STATE PARKS

“White mouth? Must be a Cottonmouth!”

MYTH

Northern Cottonmouth
Agkistrodon piscivorus



!
Venomous

Triangle Shaped Head



Venomous

Vertical-Slit Pupil



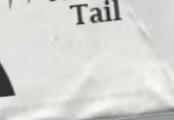
Coiled Open Mouth Position



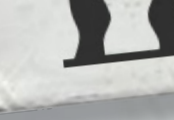
Forest



Wetlands



Normal Tail



Banded



Blotched

“Not every open mouth means danger, most are just trying to scare you off!”
— Sierra, Park Manager & Naturalist
Natural Falls State Park

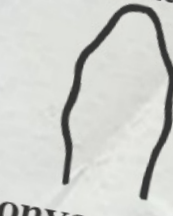
Myth: If a snake opens its mouth and shows white, its definitely a venomous cottonmouth.

Truth: Many nonvenomous snakes show a white mouth as a defensive bluff.

Western Ratsnake
Pantherophis obsoletus

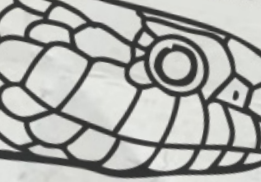


Rounded Shaped Head



Nonvenomous

Round Pupil



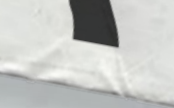
Forest



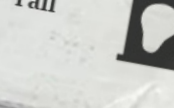
Rocky Hillside



Urban Areas



Normal Tail



Blotched

"Baby Snakes Are More Dangerous!"

Myth: Young venomous snakes are more dangerous because they can't control much venom they release.

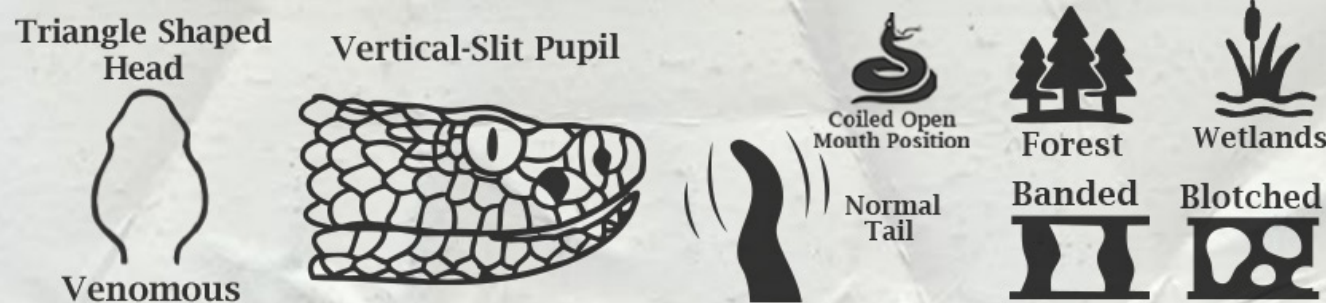
Truth: Juvenile snakes may look more colorful (like yellow tail tips or a newborn rattlesnake's first button), but there's no proof they're more dangerous than adults. A bite is serious at any age, but "uncontrolled venom" is just a myth.

MYTH

Northern Cottonmouth *Agkistrodon piscivorus*



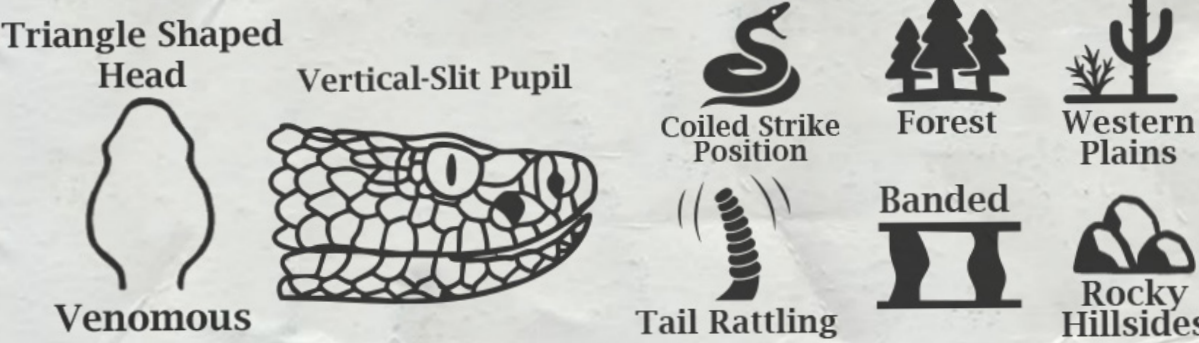
Juvenile Stage -
Adults turn darker
over time.



Western Diamondback Rattlesnake *Crotalus atrox*



Juvenile Stage -
Born with one "button"
the first segment of
its rattle tail.



"A baby rattlesnake's button doesn't rattle yet — it takes a few sheds before you hear it." — Halle, Naturalist
Lake Eufaula State Park



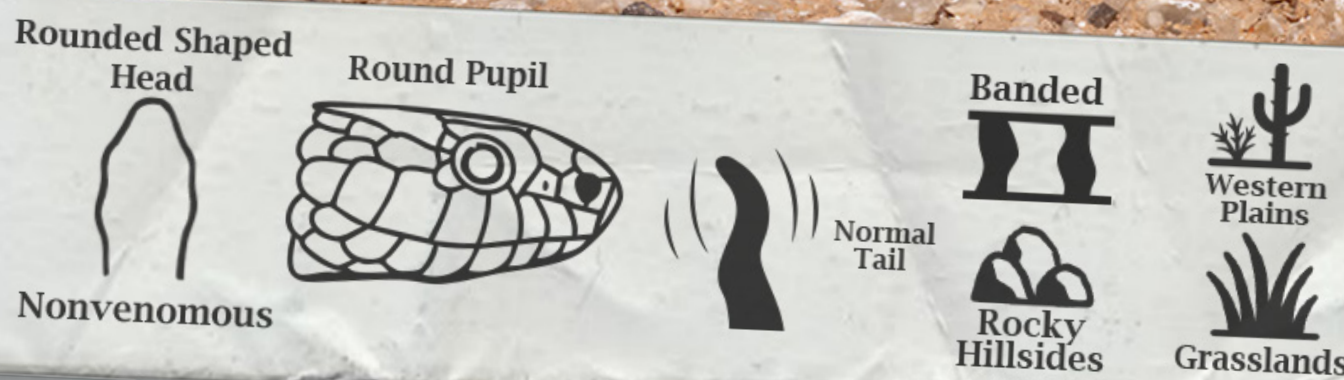
"Red Touch Yellow, Kill a Fellow"

Myth: You can ID a venomous snake by the red/yellow color rhyme.

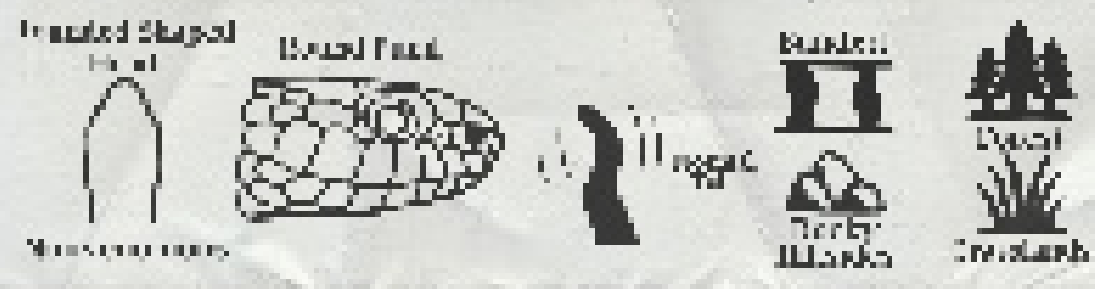
MYTH

Truth: Coral snakes *are* venomous — but they don't live in Oklahoma. Harmless species like milk snakes or long nosed snakes may have similar colors, so the rhyme doesn't apply here.

Texas Long-nosed Snake *Rhinocheilus lecontei*



Milk Snake *Lampropeltis elapsoides*



"You're more likely to see this snake helping with rodent control than causing harm."
— Sierra,
Park Manager & Naturalist
Natural Falls State Park



“Snakes Will Chase You!”

Myth: Venomous snakes will chase people down the trail or act more aggressive.

Truth: If a snake moves your way, it’s usually heading for cover — not you. Bluff charges can happen if it feels cornered, but snakes aren’t hunting hikers.

Eastern Yellow-bellied Racer

Coluber constrictor flaviventris



Nonvenomous

Rounded Shaped Head, Round Pupil, Fast Escape, Urban Areas, Rocky Hill-sides, Forest, Grasslands

Northern Cottonmouth

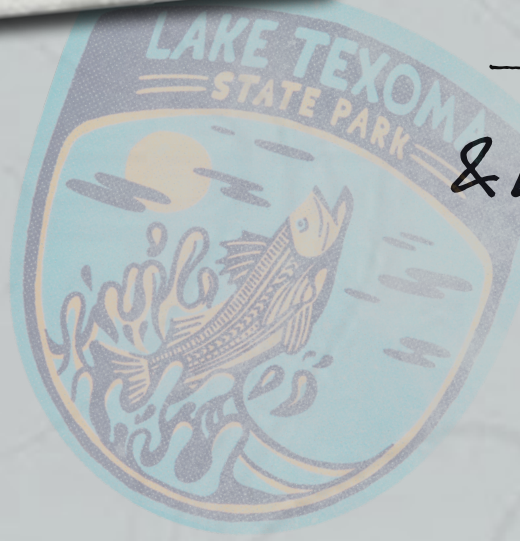
Agkistrodon piscivorus



Venomous

Triangle Shaped Head, Vertical-Slit Pupil, Coiled Open Mouth Position, Forest, Wetlands, Banded, Blotched

Adult Stage - Adults turn darker over time.



“Quick movement doesn’t mean aggression it means they’re trying to get away.”

— Kevin, Park Manager & Lake Texoma State Park


“Triangle Head = Venomous”

Myth: All snakes with a triangular head are venomous.

Truth: Many harmless snakes flatten their heads when threatened — it’s mimicry, not venom.

Plain-bellied Watersnake

Nerodia erythrogaster




Nonvenomous

Rounded Shaped Head, Round Pupil, Musking, Wetlands, Normal Tail, Blotched

Timber Rattlesnake

Crotalus horridus



Venomous

Triangle Shaped Head, Vertical-Slit Pupil, Coiled Strike Position, Forest, Grasslands, Banded, Rocky Hill-sides, Tail Rattling

Also called the “Velvet-tail” referring to the dark tail before the rattle.

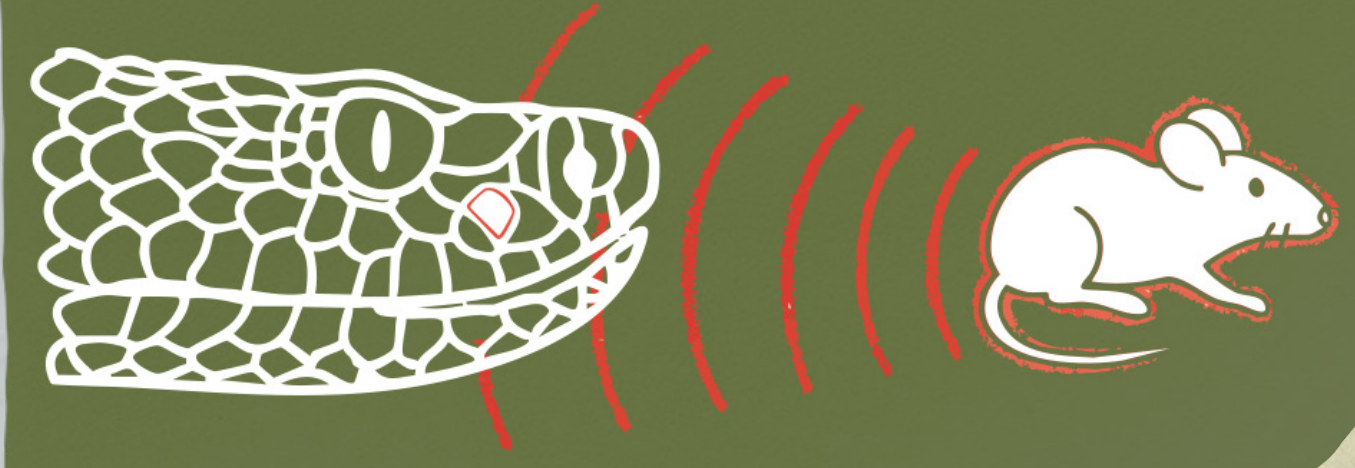
“Head shape isn’t a guarantee — a lot of harmless snakes flatten out when they feel threatened.”

— Valerie, Naturalist Greenleaf State Park



Heat-Sensing Pit Organ

Detects infrared heat from warm-blooded animals.



"Floating = Venomous"

Myth: If it's floating on the water, it's definitely a cottonmouth.

Truth: Cottonmouths can float — but so can many nonvenomous watersnakes. Some snakes even swim completely underwater! Floating isn't a venom detector.

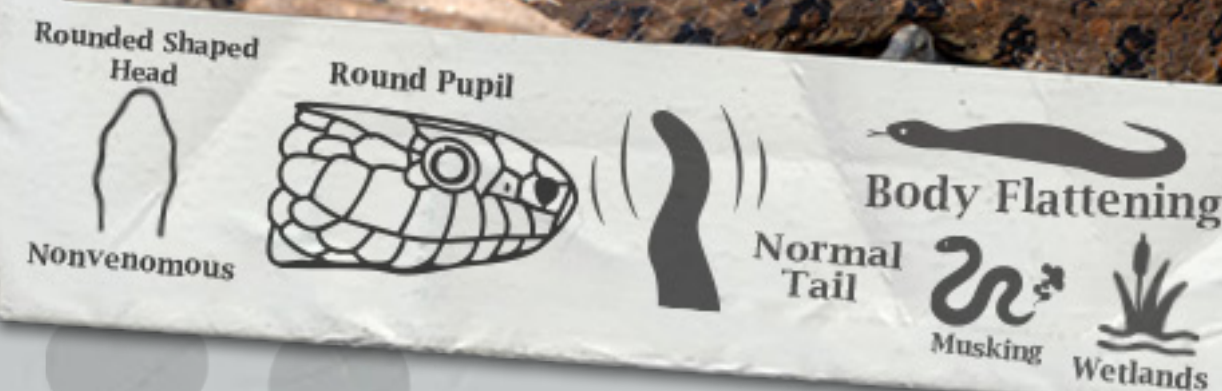
Plain-bellied Watersnake

Nerodia erythrogaster



Northern Watersnake

Nerodia sipedon



Diamond-backed Watersnake

Nerodia rhombifer



"Floating on the water, isn't a shortcut for an ID — harmless snakes do it too."

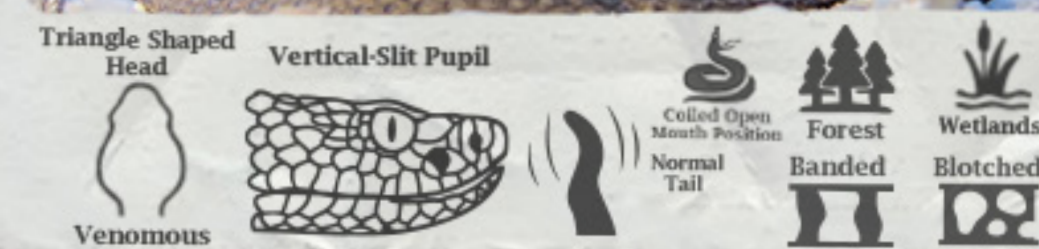
— Torie, Coordinator of Interpretive Programs

Oklahoma
STATE PARKS

Commonly Mistaken Snakes of Oklahoma

Northern Cottonmouth

Agkistrodon piscivorus



Timber Rattlesnake

Crotalus horridus



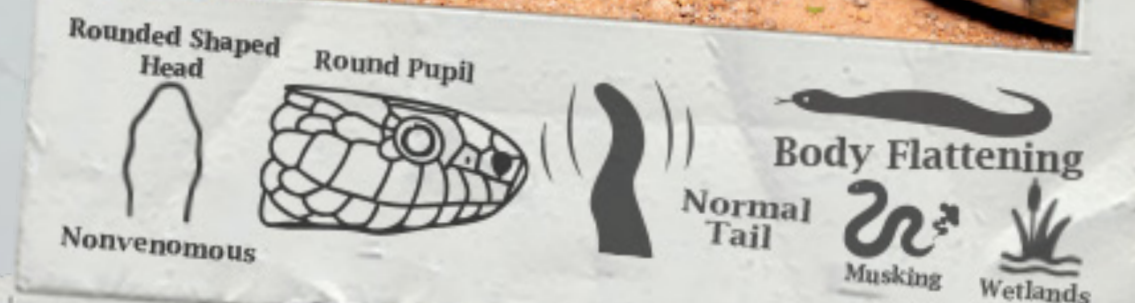
Western Massasauga

Sistrurus tergeminus



Plain-bellied Watersnake

Nerodia erythrogaster



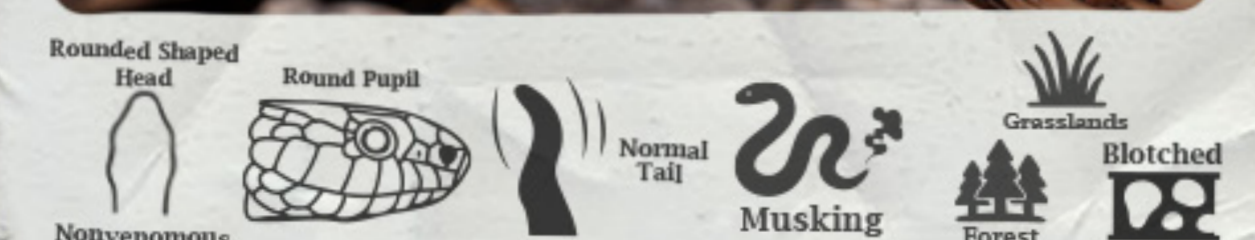
Bullsnake

Pituophis catenifer sayi



Great Plains Ratsnake

Pantherophis emoryi



KNOW YOUR LOCAL SNAKES — NOT THE MYTHS.
RESPECT THE WILDLIFE. EXPLORE RESPONSIBLY.



VOLUME 1 - IDENTIFYING COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS
ABOUT OKLAHOMA'S SNAKES

AN OFFICIAL INTERPRETIVE RESOURCE BY
OKLAHOMA STATE PARKS
