

# SNAKES

## CARNEGIE SVRA



Photo Credit:  
Tim Hart

A GUIDEBOOK TO IDENTIFY  
SNAKES AT CARNEGIE SVRA



# PROTECT SNAKES

## IN CARNEGIE SVRA

While the park provides many opportunities for OHV recreation, it also has lots of natural resources that thrive in the park. Protecting resources today makes it possible to provide quality OHV recreation in the future.



One of the natural resources protected are the variety of snakes found at Carnegie!  
The snakes that live at Carnegie are important members of the ecosystem and are protected in State Parks.



A number of different species of snakes can be found at Carnegie SVRA. This booklet will give an overview of the snakes you may find in the park and how to identify them. It will also teach you how to recreate safely with snakes.

# CALIFORNIA HAS ALMOST 50 NATIVE SPECIES OF SNAKE

AND MORE THAN 80 SUBSPECIES OF SNAKES!



## MOST SNAKES ARE HARMLESS

A **POISONOUS** SNAKE CAN HURT YOU IF YOU EAT IT.

A **VENOMOUS** SNAKE CAN HURT YOU IF IT BITES YOU.

Always give snakes their space. These snakes play an important role in the ecosystem and the food chain by keeping rodent and rabbit populations in check. California is home to 7 different species of rattlesnakes, which are venomous and can be potentially dangerous to humans.



## FUN SNAKE FACT: VENOM IN MEDICINE?

**VENOMOUS SNAKES ARE ALSO IMPORTANT IN MEDICINE: MEDICAL SCIENCE IS CREATING NEW MEDICINES USING THE PROTEINS FOUND IN SNAKE VENOM TO HELP TREAT CANCER, HEART DISEASE, DIABETES, AND OTHER DISEASES.**

# **SNAKES ARE UNDER THREAT & THEY NEED YOUR HELP!**

## **WHAT THREATENS SNAKES?**

- **HABITAT DESTRUCTION**
- **URBAN DEVELOPMENT**
- **DISEASE**
- **INVASIVE SPECIES**
- **UNSUSTAINABLE TRADE**
- **FEAR & HATRED FROM HUMANS**



## **HOW CAN YOU HELP SNAKES?**

- **RESPECT SNAKES**
- **PROMISE NOT TO HARM SNAKES**
- **APPRECIATE SNAKES KEY ROLE IN THE ECOSYSTEM AND BIODIVERSITY.**
- **INCREASE AWARENESS OF SNAKES IN YOUR AREA**
- **SUPPORT SNAKE CONSERVATION**

# SNAKES

## OF CARNEGIE SVRA

There are 15 different species of snakes that may be found at Carnegie SVRA:



- California Kingsnake
- Pacific Ring-necked Snake
- California Night Snake
- Sharp-tailed Snake
- California Striped Racer
- Valley Garter Snake
- Diablo Range Garter Snake
- Western Black-headed Snake
- Long-nosed Snake
- Western Yellow-bellied Racer
- Northern Pacific Rattlesnake
- California Glossy Snake
- Pacific Gopher Snake
- San Joaquin Coachwhip
- Alameda Whipsnake\*



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\*Carnegie is designated critical habitat for the endangered Alameda whipsnake; however, we have no recorded sightings at Carnegie.

# CALIFORNIA KINGSNAKE

NON-VENOMOUS



**SIZE** Typically, 2.5 - 3.5 feet in length. Rarely longer than 48 inches.

**APPEARANCE** Smooth, shiny scales. Color can vary; most commonly seen with alternating bands of black/brown and white/light yellow. Predators avoid because its coloring looks like a poisonous species of snake.

**BEHAVIOR** Active during day time in cooler weather or at night, dawn and dusk when temperatures are high. Feeds on rodents, lizards, snakes, frogs, and birds. Immune to rattlesnake venom.

The California Kingsnake is the boss of the landscape because they love to eat venomous snakes!

# CALIFORNIA NIGHT SNAKE

## NOT DANGEROUS

**THIS SNAKE MAY PRODUCE A MILD VENOM THAT DOES NOT TYPICALLY CAUSE DEATH OR ILLNESS IN MOST HUMANS, BUT ITS BITE SHOULD BE AVOIDED.**

**SIZE** Adults can be 12 - 26 inches long; most are 8 - 12 inches long.

**APPEARANCE** A small, slender snake with a narrow flat head and smooth scales. Pupils are vertical, like a cats. Color varies and often matches the ground where they live.

**BEHAVIOR** Nocturnal, also active at dusk and dawn. Eats a wide variety of land animals such as lizards, small snakes, frogs, and salamanders.





## CALIFORNIA STRIPED RACER

**SIZE** Generally, 30 - 48 inches in length, sometimes reaching 60 inches

**APPEARANCE** A long, fast moving snake with a thin body and a long thin tail. It has large eyes, an elongated head, and smooth scales. Color is dark olive brown, gray, or black with a pale-yellow solid stripe on each side.

**BEHAVIOR** Active during the day, often seen searching for prey with its head lifted up off the ground. Climbs vegetation and is very fast moving. Feeds on lizards, small rodents, snakes, frogs, newts, and salamanders. Known to eat small rattlesnakes.

**NOT DANGEROUS**

**THIS SNAKE DOES NOT HAVE VENOM THAT CAN CAUSE DEATH OR SERIOUS ILLNESS OR INJURY IN MOST HUMANS.**

# SAN JOAQUIN COACHWHIP

## NON-VENOMOUS

**SIZE** 36 - 66 inches in length - the only longer snake in California is the gopher snake!

**APPEARANCE** Slender, fast moving snake with smooth scales. It has a large head, a thin neck, and a long thin tail. Color is tan, olive brown, yellowish brown, or pinkish red.

**BEHAVIOR** Active in the daytime. Able to tolerate high temperatures. Moves very quickly. Good climbers; able to climb brush and trees. Eats small mammals, birds, lizards, amphibians, and carrion.





## DIABLO RANGE GARTER SNAKE

**SIZE** Adults are 18 - 40 inches long

**APPEARANCE** A medium size slender snake with a head barely wider than the neck. Color is gray, brown, or black with a distinct yellow or orange stripe down the back.

**BEHAVIOR** Highly aquatic species that are able to remain underwater but also found away from water. Active during the day and after dark in very hot weather. May strike or musk when threatened. Feeds on amphibians mostly. May eat rough-skinned newts and absorb their toxin, making the snake poisonous to predators.

### **NOT DANGEROUS**

**THIS SNAKE MAY PRODUCE A MILD VENOM THAT DOES NOT TYPICALLY CAUSE DEATH OR ILLNESS IN MOST HUMANS, BUT ITS BITE SHOULD BE AVOIDED.**

# LONG-NOSED SNAKE

## SIZE

Most adults are 16 – 30 inches long but can be up to 60 inches long.

## APPEARANCE

A slender snake with smooth scales and a head barely wider than the body. Most snakes have a white body with alternating black and red saddles that do not ring the body.

## BEHAVIOR

Active during dusk and night. Good burrowers, spending most of their time underground. Commonly found on roads at night. Eats lizards, small snakes, mammals, and insects. May vibrate tail if threatened.

## NOT DANGEROUS

**THIS SNAKE DOES NOT HAVE VENOM THAT CAN CAUSE DEATH OR SERIOUS ILLNESS OR INJURY IN MOST HUMANS.**



# NORTHERN PACIFIC RATTLESNAKE

**DANGEROUSLY VENOMOUS**



Photo Credit: Robert Fipps

**SIZE** Adults are typically 15 – 36 inches long but may reach up to 60 inches.

**APPEARANCE** A heavily bodied pit viper, with a thin neck, large triangular head, rough scales, and rattle on the tip of the tail. Pupils are elliptical like a cats. Color will typically match environment: olive-green, gray, brown, golden, reddish brown, yellow or tan.

**BEHAVIOR** Mostly active at night, dusk, and dawn, but may be active during the day in moderate temperatures. Has two hollow, moveable fangs connected to venom glands used to inject venom that immobilizes prey.

**BITES THAT INJECT VENOM INTO HUMANS ARE POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS**

**WITHOUT IMMEDIATE MEDICAL TREATMENT -**

**SEE THE LAST PAGE OF THIS BOOK FOR WHAT TO DO IF BITTEN.**

# PACIFIC GOPHER SNAKE

## NON-VENOMOUS

### SIZE

Can be 2.5 to 9 feet long; 4.5 to 5 feet long on average. The longest snakes in California!

### APPEARANCE

Large snake with rough scales, a narrow head that is slightly wider than the neck, and a rounded snout. Eyes with round pupils. Color is straw or tan, with large square chocolate blotches along the back.

### BEHAVIOR

Active in daytime and at night in hot weather. Commonly seen on roads and trails. A good burrower, climber, and swimmer. Eats small mammals and birds, and occasionally insects and lizards.

Often confused with rattlesnakes – check the eyes/head to help tell the difference.





## PACIFIC RING-NECKED SNAKE

**SIZE** Generally about 11-16 inches in length

**APPEARANCE** A small, thin snake with smooth scales. Color can be gray, blue-gray, blackish, or dark olive with a yellow or orange underside. The underside of the tail is a bright reddish orange.

**BEHAVIOR** Very secretive snake, usually found under the cover of rocks, wood, bark, or other debris. Eats small salamanders, tadpoles, small frogs, lizards, worms, or slugs. When disturbed, it will coil its tail like a corkscrew and may musk.

### NOT DANGEROUS

**THIS SNAKE MAY PRODUCE A MILD VENOM THAT DOES NOT TYPICALLY CAUSE DEATH OR ILLNESS IN MOST HUMANS, BUT ITS BITE SHOULD BE AVOIDED.**

# SHARP TAILED SNAKE

## NOT DANGEROUS

**THIS SNAKE DOES NOT HAVE VENOM THAT CAN CAUSE DEATH OR SERIOUS ILLNESS OR INJURY IN MOST HUMANS.**



## SIZE

Adults average 8 – 12 inches long, with some reaching 18 inches

## APPEARANCE

A small thin snake with a small head and a sharp point on the end of the tail. Head is typically olive-gray or brown with a rusty, brick red or orange-red body.

## BEHAVIOR

Often found on sunny days after rain, hiding under rocks, leaf litter, or woody debris. Secretive snake that spends most of its life underground or under objects. Prefers moist environments. Feeds on slugs and small salamanders.

# VALLEY GARTER SNAKE

## NOT DANGEROUS

**THIS SNAKE MAY PRODUCE A MILD VENOM THAT DOES NOT TYPICALLY CAUSE DEATH OR ILLNESS IN MOST HUMANS, BUT ITS BITE SHOULD BE AVOIDED.**

### SIZE

Adults measure 18 - 55 inches in length but average size is under 36 inches

### APPEARANCE

A medium sized snake with a head barely wider than the neck and rough scales. Color is dark grey, black, or brown on the body with a wide, yellowish stripe along the backside and a blueish grey underside.

### BEHAVIOR

Primarily active during daylight. A good swimmer. Will often musk when handled. Eats a variety of amphibians, fish, birds, small mammals, reptiles, earthworms, and slugs.





## WESTERN BLACK-HEADED SNAKE

**SIZE** One of the smallest snakes in California, about 3.5 to 15.5 inches long

**APPEARANCE** A small, thin snake with a flat head and smooth, shiny scales. The body is brown or beige; top of the head is dark brown or black; belly is whitish with reddish stripe.

**BEHAVIOR** Secretive snake that spends most of its time underground or under cover. A good burrower, able to disappear quickly into loose soil. Occasionally found active on roads at night, especially after rains. Feeds on millipedes, centipedes, and insects.

### **NOT DANGEROUS**

**THIS SNAKE MAY PRODUCE A MILD VENOM THAT DOES NOT TYPICALLY CAUSE DEATH OR ILLNESS IN MOST HUMANS, BUT ITS BITE SHOULD BE AVOIDED.**

# WESTERN YELLOW-BELLIED RACER

## NON-VENOMOUS

**SIZE** Adults can be 20 – 75 inches long, but are often under 3 feet in California.

**APPEARANCE** A slender snake with large eyes, a broad head, slender neck, smooth scales, and a long thin tail. Plain brown, blue-grey, or olive-green on the back and off-white or yellowish on the belly.

**BEHAVIOR** Active in daylight. Mainly found on the ground but is a good climber. Moves very quickly. Often bites aggressively. Eats lizards, small mammals, birds, eggs, snakes, small frogs, and insects. Hunts with head held up off the ground.



# CALIFORNIA GLOSSY SNAKE

**NON-VENOMOUS**



## **SIZE**

Adults are 26 – 70 inches in length and average 3 – 4 feet

## **APPEARANCE**

A medium sized muscular snake with smooth, glossy scales, a faded appearance, and a short tail. Generally tan or light brown color on the body with dark brown blotches on the back and sides. Underside is pale and unmarked.

## **BEHAVIOR**

Active at night; hides underground in daytime. Active late February to November, depending on weather. Most active in May, less active during summer. Feeds on lizards, snakes, mammals, and birds.



# ALAMEDA WHIPSNAKE

## NON-VENOMOUS

**SIZE** Generally, about 3 – 4 feet, sometimes up to 5 feet

**APPEARANCE** A long, fast moving snake with a thin body and a long, thin tail, large eyes, a broad elongated head, a slender neck, and smooth scales. Color is dark brown to black with a wide solid yellow-orange stripe on each side. Cream underside.

**BEHAVIOR** Active during daytime, often seen foraging with head and forward part of the body held up off the ground searching for prey. Climbs vegetation and is very fast moving and alert, quickly fleeing when threatened.

**THIS SPECIES IS PROTECTED AS A THREATENED SPECIES BY THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.**

# BE SNAKE SAFE!

Venomous snakes like rattlesnakes are common at Carnegie SVRA. But have no fear! Rattlesnakes are not generally aggressive and will avoid people. They will usually retreat if given space to move and are not provoked or threatened. You can avoid snake bites by being safe and giving snakes space when you see them. Do not attempt to touch or handle snakes, and know what to do in case of a bite.



## SAFETY TIPS

- 1) AVOID RIDING ALONE IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY**
- 2) SCAN THE GROUND AHEAD OF YOU AS YOU RIDE.**
- 3) STAY ON TRAIL AND AVOID TALL GRASS.**
- 4) LOOK CAREFULLY UNDER LOGS AND ROCKS BEFORE SITTING.**
- 5) AVOID PLACING YOUR HANDS AND FEET WHERE YOU CAN'T SEE CLEARLY.**
- 6) KEEP DOGS ON A LEASH, IN DESIGNATED AREAS, AND ON TRAILS.**
- 7) AVOID SNAKES IF YOU SEE THEM. GIVE THEM SPACE.**
- 8) DO NOT TRY TO MOVE OR KILL THEM.**

## WHAT DO TO IF BITTEN:

### 1. STAY CALM AND CALL 911.

Remain calm by laying down with the affected limb lower than heart. Do not tourniquet the limb or try to suck the venom out. If you are alone, walk calmly to the nearest source of help to dial 911.

### 2. IF BITTEN BY A SNAKE OTHER THAN A RATTLESNAKE,

Wash the wound with soap and water and seek medical attention.

### 3. IF YOU ARE NOT SURE WHAT KIND OF SNAKE BIT YOU,

Check the bite for puncture marks associated with intense, burning pain. This is typical of a rattlesnake bite. Other snake bites may leave multiple teeth marks without associated burning pain.



Snakes are an important resource in the natural environment. Enjoy them from afar and leave them where they are found. It is illegal to collect, kill, or remove any plants or animals from State Parks. Help us to protect wildlife and their environment for present and future generations.

## HAVE FUN AND BE SAFE!

Special Thanks to Gary Nafis, who took many of the excellent photos used for this booklet and graciously let us use them to educate the public on Carnegie's snakes!



**Carnegie State Vehicular Recreation Area**

**18600 West Corral Hollow Road**

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**[www.ohv.parks.ca.gov/carnegie](http://www.ohv.parks.ca.gov/carnegie)**

