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TITLE: SNAKES ARE OUT!

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Snakes are out! I have been seeing live and dead snakes along the roads this past week. You can usually tell when the snakes are active by how many dead snakes you see on the roads. Snakes can move after dark, especially after a warm shower.

Snakes eat insects, fish, amphibians, birds, rodents, eggs and other reptiles. And many snakes eat nuisance animals, too. In fact, one rat snake can eat two or three rats every two weeks. Clearly then, one snake can greatly impact an ecosystem by reducing the potential for serious diseases, like Lyme disease.

At the first sign of danger, or human contact, snakes will usually flee. Most snakes strike in defense as a last resort. Non-venomous snakes are usually harmless.

Unfortunately, there is no one clear rule to use to tell the difference between a venomous snake and a poisonous snake. Head or eye pupil shape has not been confirmed one-hundred percent as a sure distinction. Here are details on a few non-venomous snake species commonly found in Georgia.

King snakes are found in a wide variety of habitats. Adults can reach four feet in length. Eastern king snakes are black with yellow or whitish crossbands. The black king snake, found in northwestern Georgia, is black with scattered flecks of yellow. The belly is a combination of black and yellow. They feed on the regular snake and other snakes, including venomous species. King snakes are immune to the venom of rattlesnakes, cottonmouths and copperheads.

Water snakes are found in aquatic environments. However, some species have been spotted several hundred feet away from water. Water snakes often grow to a length of four feet and are light brown on top with darker squares on the back and sides. The brown water snake is the most common and is often mistaken for the venomous cottonmouth. This snake frequently basks on tree limbs that overhang the water. Brown water snakes feed almost exclusively on fish.

Garter snakes are found in habitats that are damp, although not necessarily near permanent water. They are usually less than two feet long, but can get longer. They have three yellow longitudinal strips on a dark body. They have black lines on their lip scales. Although this pattern is common, some garter snakes in Georgia have a checkered body pattern with poorly defined stripes and a grayish body color. Their bellies are white or light yellow. This species gives birth to live young, sometimes having more than 50 babies. Garter snakes feed on fish, small reptiles and amphibians.

Rat snakes are most often found in wooded swampy areas. Adults grow to more than four feet in length. Inland species range from black to light gray or brown. They feed on birds, rats, mice and squirrels. They are known as “chicken snakes” in farming areas because they readily eat caged chickens.

Black racers are found in a wide variety of habitats. Racers are frequently seen crossing highways during the day. Adults are usually slender, three to five feet long and black except for a white chin. They feed on frogs, rodents, birds, lizards and insects.

To avoid all snake species, be cautious when gardening and performing lawn chores. You can also limit your encounters with snakes by not creating habits for them in your yard.