
for the
BIRDS

For the Birds Group

and other critters

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...of cabbages and kings

With our apologies to Lewis Carroll, we want to “talk of other things”, though not shoes and ships.. and sealing wax. We have discussed including the many other types of wildlife in our activities and even mentioned that in our introductory letter to all.

With that in mind we have been spending some time looking at the many varieties that are part of our lifestyle at Sanctuary on the Park. Some cuddly and warm, some cunning and stealth like. And some we would rather be without. I would suppose this would be one of the latter.

Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeew

It kinda fits the reaction we get when we even start a conversation about snakes, let alone coming in direct contact with one. They are maybe one of the most misunderstood creatures on our planet.

We have our share right here at Sanctuary on the Park, too. That’s why we thought a short “primer”, if you will, on the snakes we see here would be good. This is especially true at this time of year, when snakes come out to gain strength and mobility from the warmth of the sun. They need this warmth, you see, for that very reason.

Since our collective reaction, for the most part is to recoil from or to attack a snake, a quick look, sometimes, is all that is necessary to gain the assurance of what we are dealing with.

Garter snakes are one of the most common of snakes. They do not generally grow to any great size and are one of the first snakes that youngsters see and catch. And with good reason. They are seen in gardens and a variety of available habitats. They are harmless and, in fact, very beneficial. They eat mostly insects and worms and are not venomous. Due to their small size



they are quick to heat up and cool down. Their natural enemies are other large snakes, hawks and other mammalian predators. If you chance upon one in your garden we would advise you to let it alone. It can only help not hurt the garden.

GARTER SNAKE

A little on the other side of the scale is another “friend” of the snake population in our community. The Prairie Rattler. These guys are venomous and caution is advised when dealing with them. They are more prevalent in the spring and summer due, also, to the warmer weather. They do much of their hunting at night since they have poor eyesight but sense their prey with their heat sensitive pits and their forked tongues which can pick up scents. They eat mice, rats, gophers among other small sized species. They may live among prairie dogs and burrowing owls and will eat the young of both, thus proving their “good neighbor” moniker. Their natural enemies are some hawks, owls, eagles and larger snakes. Other animals will kill a rattler if they have the opportunity, although they won’t eat it.



There are, of course, many other snakes we see, including the Bull Snake and King Snake, among others. Both of these snakes are non-venomous and are also beneficial. They eat prairie dogs, rats, gophers and other small animals such as frogs and even smaller snakes.

PRAIRIE RATTLER

The limited space, however, does not permit including more information on them. What we do want to do, here, is to provide a “primer”, if you will, on a cursory identifying method. Are there exceptions? To be sure, but we would guess that when you come across a snake, the first thing you do NOT think about is running to your trusty Funk & Wagnall Encyclopedia you got handed down in the family.

So here is a good way to tell these fellas apart (as well as a good indication of venomous & non-venomous snakes) :

1. Shape of the head -

- The garter snake and other non-venomous snakes heads are oblong and they contour to the body
- The rattler head is triangular with a skinny neck

2. Shape of the eyes -

- The garter snake eyes are round
- The rattler eyes are elliptical

How’re we doin’ ?

Let us hear from you. Maybe you have a special interest in a particular type of wildlife.

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