



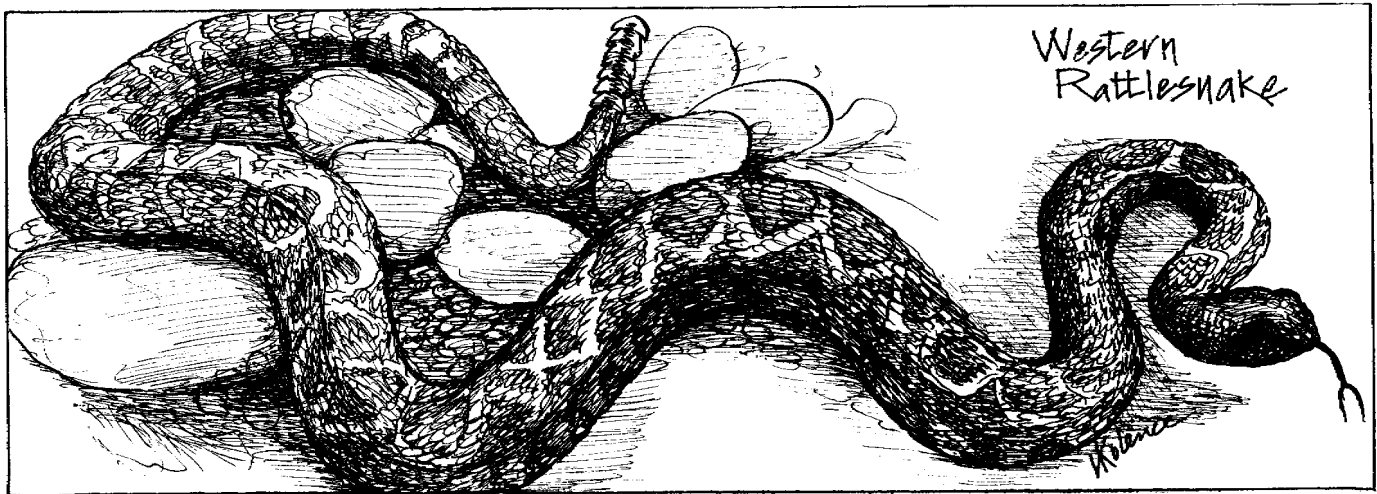
# Footfills

## Nature Notes

CITY OF PALO ALTO • COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT • OPEN SPACE, PARKS AND GOLF DIVISION

### Watch Out for Rattlesnakes

**Description:** Rattlesnakes are pit vipers characterized by the presence of a rattle on the tail. They also possess stout bodies, heart-shaped heads and the most elaborate and efficient venom-injection system among the snakes. The term “pit” refers to the presence of heat-sensitive depressions on each side of the head. These pits function to detect warm animals and to guide the direction of the strike, especially at night. After striking a victim a rattlesnake can trail its prey by moving its tongue in and out, picking up odorous particles from the air then transferring them to a chemo-receptive organ in the mouth. This organ is also used in locating the opposite sex during the mating season and other rattlesnakes when hibernation groups are formed.



**Distribution, Habitat and Season:** Related to the Fer de Lance and the Bushmaster, rattlesnakes are widely distributed throughout most of the United States. The Western Rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*), common in chaparral woodland, is the only poisonous snake in the Bay Area. In September a female may bear 7-12 live young, each of which has a single button at the tip of its tail. A new rattle is formed each time the skin is shed, which may occur two to three times a year. Rattlesnakes are active from April to October, but are the most active in the warmest months.

**Diet:** Ground squirrels, rabbits, birds, rodents, lizards, and frogs are the main courses on this pit viper’s menu.

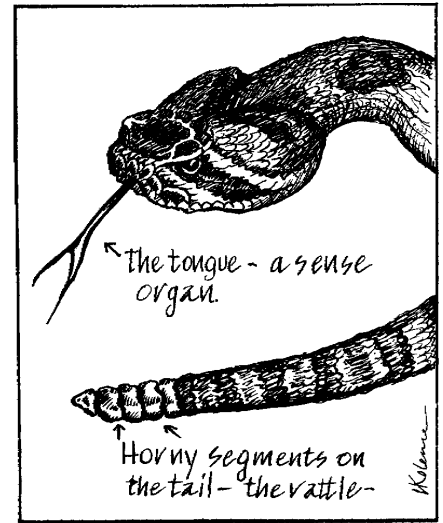
**Enemies:** As part of the web of life, deer, hawks, owls, coyotes, foxes, and kingsnakes will attack and kill rattlesnakes. However, humans are perhaps its greatest enemy even though rattlesnakes may benefit humans in controlling rodent populations.

**Venom:** The poison injected through the rattlesnake's fangs is modified saliva consisting of both proteins and enzymes. This hemotoxin attacks blood cells and capillary walls.

**Bites:** The chances of meeting a rattlesnake are slim and the chances of being bitten are even more remote. While caution is always in order, remember that these snakes are just as afraid of you as you are of them.

**Helpful Hints:**

- When hiking, walk in the center of the trail, frequently scanning the ground ahead.
- When a sudden buzzing sound is heard, stop and locate the source.
- Do not reach into bushes or behind logs and rocks.
- Wear jeans and boots when hiking in rattlesnake country.
- Be familiar with rattlesnake first aid treatment.



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