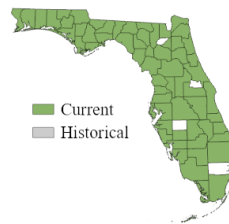


EASTERN DIAMONDBACK RATTLESNAKE

Crotalus adamanteus



Order: Squamata

Family: Viperidae

FNAI Ranks: G3/S3

U.S. Status: none

FL Status: none

Description: A large, heavy-bodied, venomous snake with a bold pattern of dark brown to black diamonds bordered by cream to yellow scales, running the length of the back; ground color tan to dark brown, tail usually lighter than body but with dark rings. Head triangular, much wider than neck, covered with many small scales, and with sensory pit between each nostril and eye; dark, diagonal stripe passing through eye, bordered by two white lines. Conspicuous rattle at tip of tail; scales on sides and back with distinct keels. Adults usually 4 - 6 ft. (122 - 183 cm), newborn 12 - 15 in. (300 - 380 mm).

Similar Species: Timber rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*; see species account) has dark chevrons or bands and rusty mid-dorsal stripe on back, lacks white-bordered, dark band through eye, and usually has dark tail. Pigmy rattlesnake (*Sistrurus miliarius*) is much smaller (to 2 ft. = 61 cm), has rounded, black blotches on back and sides, often a rusty mid-dorsal stripe, gray ground color, nine large plates rather than small scales atop head, and a tiny rattle that is easily overlooked. Copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix*) and cottonmouth (*A. piscivorus*) lack rattle and diamonds on back.

Habitat: Broad range of habitats, but most commonly associated with pines, especially longleaf, in sandhills, flatwoods, upland pine forests, and (rarely) scrub. Also oldfields, floodplains, hardwood hammocks, dry prairie, and coastal strand; can cross salt water to reach islands. Commonly uses gopher tortoise burrows and root holes for refuge; often associated with saw palmetto.

Seasonal Occurrence: Active in warm weather from spring to fall; gives birth in late summer; generally spends winter below ground.

Florida Distribution: Historic range includes nearly the entire state, from Escambia County to the Florida Keys. The species certainly has been extirpated locally at many

sites, especially in areas of dense human population.

Range-wide Distribution: Southeastern Coastal Plain, from southeastern North Carolina to extreme eastern Louisiana.

Conservation Status: Though declining, populations still occur on many state and federal lands in Florida, but only those with 10,000 or more acres of appropriate habitat may support long-term viable populations. Although very large numbers are killed from fear as well as for curio and leather trades, habitat destruction and fragmentation are the greatest threats.

Protection and Management: Most efforts to maintain natural habitat conditions are probably compatible with the snake's existence. Throughout much of the state, management regimes should emphasize the preservation of open-canopied pine uplands while maintaining a mosaic of other habitat types and limiting conversion of forest to agriculture (see Hoss et al. 2010). Of special value in some habitats is the maintenance of populations of the gopher tortoise, the burrows of which provide retreats that are important to this snake. Land managers need to educate visitors and staff to the protected nature of the species on most Managed Areas; hunters and others must be warned not to kill rattlesnakes. Closing unnecessary roads will result in fewer snakes being killed by drivers.

References: Ashton and Ashton 1988b, Conant and Collins 1991, Ernst and Barbour 1989, Lazell 1989, Martin and Means 1998, Mount 1975, Tenant 1997, Timmerman 1989.



Adult. © Robert Gundy



Juvenile. © Robert Gundy