

TIMBER RATTLESNAKE

Crotalus horridus



Order: Squamata

Family: Viperidae

FNAI Ranks: G4/S3

U.S. Status: none

FL Status: none

Description: A medium to large, heavy-bodied, venomous snake with dark brown to black zigzag bands (chevrons) on back, a pinkish-brown to gray ground color (often with a rusty mid-dorsal stripe), and a tail that is usually darker than body. Head triangular, much wider than neck, covered with many small scales, and with sensory pit between each nostril and eye. Pupils vertical; dark stripe behind eye lacks white border. Conspicuous rattle at tip of tail; anal scale undivided; scales of back and sides distinctly keeled. Adults usually 3.5 - 5 ft. (91 - 152 cm), newborn 8 - 14 in. (200 - 355 mm).

Similar Species: Diamondback rattlesnake (*Crotalus adamanteus*; see species account) has light-bordered, dark diamonds on back, a white-bordered, dark stripe through eye, and usually a light tail with darker bands. 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 rusty mid-dorsal stripe.

Habitat: Wet lowland forests, including pine flatwoods, floodplain hammocks, swamps, and ruderal areas.

Seasonal Occurrence: Active during warmer months from spring to fall; gives birth in late summer.

Florida Distribution: Occurs only in northern Florida, with most records being east of the Suwannee River; Union County lies roughly at the center of the Florida range. This species is known from one confirmed record in the Florida Panhandle (Walton County). Allen (1949) and Gloyd's (1940) reports of specimens from Gadsden and Liberty counties remain questionable; if species once occurred there, it now seems to

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be locally extirpated. One old museum record from the lower Suwannee River (Dixie County).

Range-wide Distribution: Much of eastern half of U.S., from New England and lower Midwest south to eastern Texas and northern Florida.

Conservation Status: Uncommon and declining in state, but Osceola National Forest and nearby state lands support species; may also inhabit Eglin Air Force Base. Although some are killed from fear as well as for curio and leather trades, habitat destruction and fragmentation are the greatest threats.

Protection and Management: Avoid building new roads, and close unneeded existing ones, in occupied areas. Landowners and managers need to be encouraged to protect this species rather than to kill it on sight; hunter education programs are vital to this goal. Unnecessary roads should be closed.

References: Ashton and Ashton 1988b, Brown 1993, Conant and Collins 1991, Ernst and Barbour 1989, Mount 1975, Tenant 1997.



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