



COPPERHEAD

Kingdom: Animalia **Phylum:** Chordata **Class:** Reptilia **Order:** Squamata **Family:** Viperidae
Agkistrodon contortrix

Description: Copperhead Snakes have an unmarked copper-colored head, and reddish-brown, coppery bodies with chestnut brown crossbands. They have a sulfur-yellow tipped tail that fades with age and is usually gone by the age of 3

Length: 30 inches

Habitat: Leaf-covered clearings in deciduous forests

Distribution: North America

Diet: Small rodents, reptiles and amphibians

Life Span: 18 years

Status: In Massachusetts only they are listed as Endangered.

Special Characteristics:

- Copperheads will attempt to warn off predators by shaking their tails and imitating a rattlesnake.
- Although bites are not as toxic as a rattlesnake's, they are extremely painful.
- Copperheads have a heat sensitive pit located between the eye and the nostril on each side of the head that they use to detect warm-blooded prey.
- They don't actively hunt, but lay in wait for prey.
- They have hollow, curved, retractable fangs that are normally folded back along the jaw but as the snake opens its mouth to strike the fangs spring forward into position.
- The length of the fangs is in direct proportion to the length of the snake.
- There is a series of 5-7 replacement fangs in the gums behind the current fangs.
- Males have longer tails than females, but the females have a longer length.
- They tend to live in communal dens.
- These snakes hibernate during winter.
- Although they are land snakes, they have been seen voluntarily entering water and swimming
- They are diurnal in the spring and fall, and nocturnal in the summer
- Primarily ambushers, the Copperheads will inject venom into their prey and then track them down after they die. Smaller prey are held in their mouth until they die.
- Also known as the Highland Moccasin

Reproduction:

- Sexual maturity is 4 years old or about 2 feet long
- Males seek out sexually active females using their tongue to detect pheromones in the air.
- Females that breed in autumn store the sperm until after emerging from a hibernating site.
- Gestation is 3-9 months
- Females are ovoviviparous (eggs develop in the body of the female and hatch within or immediately after being expelled).
- Females do not nurture their young.

