



Living with Wildlife ~ Snakes

Snakes are a natural part of our environment. While they may cause some people apprehension, objectively they are essentially like any other animal. They have the same motivations that other animals and humans have, such as finding food, shelter, a mate, etc. Many people view snakes as sinister, but that is an imaginary personification. Humans are the only animal capable of such a trait. It should also be noted that snakes are not aggressive, though they can be defensive. As humans, we should view ourselves as *part of the environment* and work to *preserve it*, rather than contribute to its destruction.

Snakes are an animal many people kill needlessly, generally not realizing such short-sighted behavior is quite ill-advised. Among other functions in our diverse ecosystem, snakes serve as natural “pest control technicians.” They efficiently consume many species that negatively affect our lives, such as mice and rats. Those versed in the natural world appreciate seeing snakes, as that is one sign of a healthy ecosystem. Moreover, besides the ethical compunctions we *should* feel at destroying wildlife, killing snakes is a fruitless and risky endeavor. Killing such an integral natural predator simply causes a spike in the population of the prey it was there to consume, which in turn prompts another snake to move in and fill the gap. Meanwhile, choosing to interfere with the animal greatly increases your chance of injury.

The proper response to seeing a snake you cannot identify as harmless (which most species are) is to simply *leave the animal alone*. An easy rule is to “Take Three Steps Back and Walk Away.” This will prevent needless harm to you or the animal. If you wish to reduce the number of snakes on your property in an ecologically sound and ethical manner, here are some tips:

- ⇒ **Seal gaps and cracks in your foundation and siding.** Many animals may seek refuge in artificial shelter. This critical step cannot be emphasized enough. Simply removing a snake without precluding their re-entry is virtually pointless, as another animal will simply find the same entry point.
- ⇒ **Keep your yard manicured.** Tall vegetation and debris on the ground are attractive cover for wildlife. Be aware however that frequent watering may also attract thirsty animals. Piles of wood and lumber are especially attractive and should be neatly stacked in a safe area away from dwellings.
- ⇒ **Don’t offer an easy meal.** A property that contains mice, rats, squirrels, frogs, fish or other prey items will invariably attract predators. Examples of items that attract prey include uncovered trash receptacles, pet food bowls and messy bird feeders- if you feed the prey- you are inviting the predator.
- ⇒ **Attract predators from a higher trophic tier.** Installing perch poles may invite raptors to keep an eye on your yard *for you*.
- ⇒ **Install snake fencing.** Dug-in barriers two foot high of flat metal or tight mesh tend to keep snakes out fairly effectively. While most snakes are efficient climbers, their natural tendency is to travel along such a barrier rather than over it.
- ⇒ **Do not waste money on repellants.** Products that claim to keep snakes away are not only ineffective- many are poisons that should not be released into the environment.

Remember- there is no way to keep any part of the outdoors completely snake-free. These measures should only be a supplement to properly educating and training yourself, your family and your pets about wildlife safety and identification. Only a small percentage of snakes are venomous, and everyone should familiarize themselves with those species. Even if you try to “snake-proof” your yard- you should still teach your children to watch where they put their hands and feet, and to walk away from snakes. Likewise, pets should have aversion training for their safety and that of the animals. Do not try to interfere with (handle, relocate, kill, etc.) any venomous species without proper training (and there should be no reason to interfere with harmless species!).

Ultimately, education tends to overcome fear. Please consider further study of the animals that live around us every day. Learning to cooperate with nature is much easier and safer than trying to control it. The goal should be for no animals to die simply as a result of human ignorance or negligence.

Decide to be a part of the solution today!



Rough Greensnake photo by Justin Sokol