

# Wildlife Tales

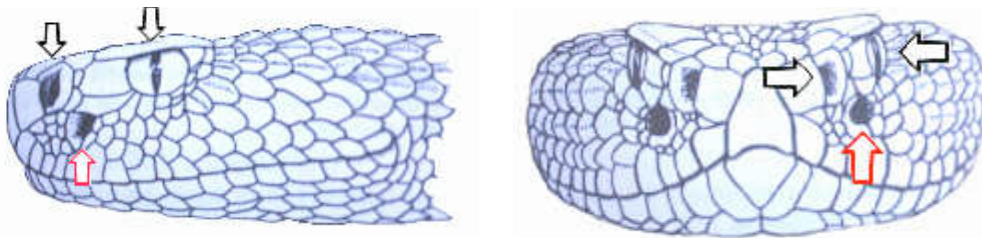
## Venomous Snakes of Tennessee

by Lisa Powers

There are 33 species of snakes native to Tennessee; only 4 of these are venomous:

- Copperhead
- Western Cottonmouth
- Timber Rattlesnake
- Pigmy Rattlesnake

All of the venomous snakes native to Tennessee belong to the family of snakes called pit vipers. Pit vipers are the group of venomous snakes having a specialized, heat-sensing pit on the front of the head.



**Illustrations of side and front views of rattlesnake head showing the eye and nostril (black arrows) and facial pit (red arrow). Credit: Florida Museum of Natural History.**

All of the venomous snakes native to Tennessee have hypodermic fangs in the upper mouth. Nonvenomous snakes have small teeth but no fangs. Venomous snake shown on top, nonvenomous on bottom. Photo by John White.



All of the venomous snakes native to Tennessee have a vertical, elliptical shaped eye pupil (photo below, on left). Nonvenomous snakes in Tennessee have a round pupil (photo below, on right). Photos by Lisa Powers, Froghaven Farm.



## Wildlife Tales (continued)

All of the venomous snakes native to Tennessee are ovoviviparous—they retain the eggs within the body until the young are expelled in a membranous sac, ready to face the world.

These neonate (newborn) Copperheads are showing their bright yellow tail tips they will use to lure prey closer. They will stay in the area where they were born for just a few days until they have shed their skin for the very first time. Photo by David Scott.



All of the venomous snakes native to Tennessee have a single row of scales on the underside from the vent to the tip of the tail. All of our nonvenomous snakes have an overlapping row of two scales on the underside from the vent to the tail tip. **Note:** This detail is best observed on the shed skin of a snake.



Juvenile Western Cottonmouth pictured on left, juvenile Northern Water Snake pictured on right. Photos by Lisa Powers, Froghaven Farm.



**In Tennessee it is illegal to harm, kill, remove from the wild, or possess native wildlife taken from the wild without the proper permits (including snakes)!**