

Copperhead



What does it look like?

Missouri's copperheads are pinkish tan with distinct, dark brown markings along their backs that are shaped like a bow tie or hourglass (pinched in the middle and wide on either side).

Newborn copperheads and those under two years of age are slightly paler, but they still have the same markings. Young copperheads have sulfur yellow tails. This coloration is gone when they are 2 years old.



Can you see the yellow tail?

Copperheads of all ages have a dark marking on the sides of the head bordered by a thin black line and a cream or white line. This marking and others along the back and sides help disrupt or break up the outline of their body and, along with their pinkish tan coloration, allow them to blend perfectly with the colors of dead leaves on the forest floor.



Copperheads are considered medium-sized snakes and average 24 to 36 inches long. Adult male copperheads generally grow to longer lengths than females. Thus, a copperhead 36 or 39 inches long is likely a large male. Copperheads may reach a maximum length of over 43 inches.

What do copperheads eat?

Over 90 percent of an adult copperhead's diet consists of mice, especially deer mice and voles. Copperheads also eat other rodents, such as house mice and young chipmunks. Snakes, including venomous species, have a role or job description as part of the checks-and-balance system of nature and should be valued as a primary, natural controller of destructive rodents.



A copperhead has flexible jaws that allow it to eat rodents 3 times the size of their head.

Where can you find a copperhead?

The copperhead lives in open forests along creeks, on rocky, southeast, or southwest-facing hillsides and near abandoned farm buildings, abandoned saw mills and discarded woodpiles. Copperheads will live under lumber piles, discarded corrugated roof tin or other objects near abandoned farm buildings. The southern copperhead has a tendency to live close to creeks, rivers, river backwaters and swamps. Missouri has abundant natural and manmade habitats where copperheads can live and thrive.



Southern Copperhead *Agkistrodon contortrix contortrix*

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Copperhead Myths

Copperheads always move in pairs-if you see one you will find another. Not true. Copperheads are competing with each other for food and shelter. If they remain together, their chances of finding enough prey to eat is reduced. If copperheads are found together it is because the habitat is ideal and may sustain more than one snake, or the site may be an over wintering den.

Baby copperheads are more dangerous than adults. Not true. There is no biological reason for baby copperheads to have more potent venom than adults. They have smaller venom glands, tiny fangs and are not capable of producing venom more potent than adult copperheads.

Copperhead Skeleton

