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About Our Cover

Juvenile Eastern Copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix*)

The Eastern Copperhead is one of several poisonous snakes found throughout the central and eastern United States. They are heavy-bodied snakes with triangular heads and are characterized by dark hourglass-shaped bands along their bodies. Unlike adults, which can reach 2–3 feet in length and are mainly a coppery reddish-brown in coloration, the smaller juveniles are grayer in color and display bright yellow tails that fade by the age of sexual maturity around 2–4 years of age. Copperheads breed late in the summer, and after incubating the eggs inside her body, the female gives birth to 2–18 living young around August to early October. Being well camouflaged, copperheads are responsible for the majority of snake bites in the eastern United States, usually when they feel threatened or surprised. Fortunately, their venom is among the least potent of all the pit vipers and is typically not fatal to humans. Their fangs, capable of releasing venom, are replaced periodically through its life, and the five to seven pairs of replacement fangs are stored in the gums behind the current set. Like other pit vipers, they use heat sensors located in their heads to detect prey and avoid predators. Being opportunistic feeders, they prey upon and eat whatever comes their way. Primarily feeding on rodents, lizards, frogs, and some large insects such as caterpillars and cicada nymphs. Copperheads can live for up to 18 years in the wild and 25 years in captivity. This individual was encountered early one morning resting on a log while exploring the wonders of Scotts Run Nature Preserve in Fairfax County, Virginia. The image was taken using a tripod-mounted Nikon D750 Camera with a 60 mm Micro-Nikon lens. The photographer is Bob Ford. At the time the photograph was taken, Bob was on the faculty at Frederick Community College in Maryland teaching ecology and environmental science courses. He has since retired and is enjoying the biological wonders of Asheville, North Carolina.

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