

THE ARBORETUM AT PENN STATE

TIMBER RATTLESNAKE

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NAME: *Crotalus horridus*

CONSERVATION STATUS:



SIZE: 3–5 feet

WEIGHT: 1–3.3 pounds

GROUP TERM: den; nest; pit; knot

NUMBER OF YOUNG: 5–20

HABITAT: moist, lowland forests

LIFESPAN: 15–22 years

DISTRIBUTION:



TIMBER RATTLESNAKE

DESCRIPTION

The timber rattlesnake is one of three venomous snakes found in Pennsylvania (including the Massasauga and northern copperhead), all of which can be identified by their flat, triangular heads, vertical pupils, and single row of ventral scales. The timber rattlesnake is perhaps best known for its namesake tail, which buzzes angrily when rattled as a warning to potential predators. This sound is created by the accumulation of dried, shed skin on the tail's loose, interlocking "buttons." Each time an old skin is shed, a new rattle is added.

DIET

Small mammals make up over 90% of the rattlesnake's diet, which are killed by an injection of venom through the snake's fangs.

THREATS

Although preyed upon by coyotes, foxes, raccoons, and birds of prey, the timber rattlesnake also faces human-caused habitat destruction throughout its range.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The timber rattlesnake is one of only a few reptiles to possess a heat-sensing pit on its face, allowing it to sense prey by temperature as well as sound and smell.
- All snakes use a special "Jacobson's organ" to transmit chemical scent through their flickering tongues.
- The timber rattlesnake's scientific name comes from the Latin *crotalum*, meaning "bell" or "rattle," and *horridus*, meaning "dreadful."