

Snakes around the lake area

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**Lake Gaston Association
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Introduction

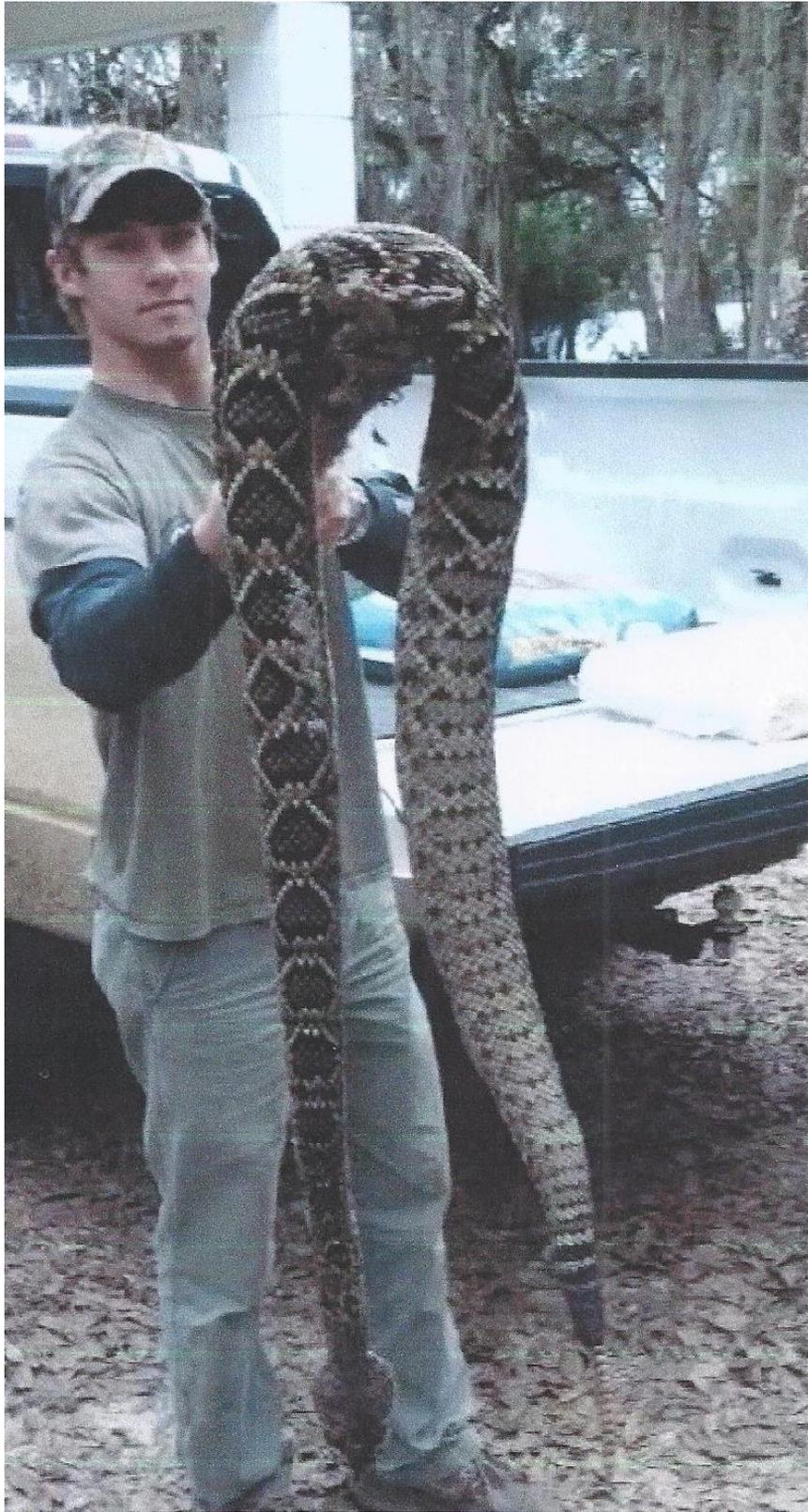
Ms. Janet Kaiser, Emergency Room Director, VCU Community Memorial Hospital (See accompanying handout for treatment aspects)

Tony Moran, Warren County Lake Gaston Assoc. Director and lifelong collector and researcher of N.C. snakes

Please hold your questions till the end of the presentations

Venomous and Non-venomous Snakes in the Lake Area

I chose to focus on venomous and non-venomous snakes that resemble each other.



Large Eastern Diamond Back Rattlesnake

I selected the first snake as an attention getter. **The Eastern Diamond Back Rattlesnake.** Not normally found in this region but is in the Southeastern counties of N.C. This 9.5 foot monster with 2.5 inch fangs was shot by the young man when it entered their hunting blind. Prevalent in the coastal areas of Georgia [St Simmons and Jeckel Islands]



Corn snake

Corn Snake many times confused with Copperheads. Sort after by the pet trade. N.C. W.R.C has a separate unit to enforce poaching regulations. Popular due to coloring and gentle nature.



Red Banded Water Snake

Many times confused with Water Moccasins. Very prevalent around the lake and rarely reaches full size due to herons, birds of prey and unenlightened property owners. A shame as they do feed on muskrats.



Canebrake/Timber Rattlesnake **(Venomous)**

Located throughout N.C. Can be aggressive but will normally warn you by rattling. More reported sightings both East and West of the lake area. Note its position. Do not step over logs!



Water Moccasin/Cottonmouth (Venomous)

More established East of I-95 in low and swampy areas. [I sighted a very large one in Roanoke Rapids Lake] However, they do reside here at the lake and care should be taken when moving under overhead vegetation. This is not a critter you want to share your boat with!



**Copperhead
(Venomous)**

See next page ...

Copperhead

By far, the most dangerous venomous snake at the lake. N.C. leads the nation in venomous snake bites with 5 x the national average and all because of this snake. An old adage is that the reason you see so many dead ones on the road is that they are so aggressive that they will take on a 3000 lb vehicle. It is actually just the opposite.

This snake relies on its ability to blend in on its surroundings. Its last recourse is to advise you of its presence and that is usually done by biting you. Most victims are struck when placing their hands or feet under shrubbery. You should not rely on frightening an unseen snake before working on a project. In no way should your hands or feet be under shrubbery.

Best advice when seeing any snake is to take 2 steps back, pause and repeat. Firearms may cause damage and many of us do not have the eye and hand co-ordination to dispatch with a garden tool.

Dry Bites. Unlike other area venomous snakes, the Copperhead has more of a tendency to inflict a bite without injecting venom. Some figures show this may be as much as 40% of the time, particularly with pets. A medical professional should be the verifying factor.

Handout from Janet Kaiser, Emergency Department Director, VCU Health Community Memorial Hospital in South Hill, VA

Snake Bites

from the Virginia Poison Center

Virginia is home to thirty different species of snakes. Most are beneficial to people and to the environment because their diet includes pests such as rodents and insects. Countless snakes are needlessly killed every year because they are considered “poisonous” and dangerous, when in fact, most are harmless.

There are only three species of poisonous snakes in Virginia. The most common is the **copperhead**, which is found statewide. The **cottonmouth**, or **water moccasin**, always lives near water and only in the southeastern region of Virginia. Two types of **rattlesnakes** live in the state. Timber rattlesnakes are found in the western, mountainous portion of the state. Canebrake rattlesnakes, a state endangered species, live only near the Dismal Swamp. All of these snakes are in the *Crotalidae* pit viper “family”: they have a heat-sensing pit located between the eye and nostril.

Symptoms

Snakebite may cause these in the body part that was bitten:

- o Immediate pain which tends to get worse over time
- o Steadily increasing swelling, often involving the entire bitten extremity
- o The skin around the bite site becomes discolored, looking like a bruise

Sometimes the victim will also complain of a metallic taste, nausea, faintness, sweating, and tingling around the lips.

First Aid for Snakebite

- o Keep the snake bite victim calm and at rest
- o Wash the site well with soap and water
- o Remove any tight clothing or jewelry on the extremity that was bitten
- o Position the extremity at the level of the heart, or slightly elevated
- o Do NOT apply tourniquet, do NOT apply ice and do NOT attempt to cut the skin or suck the venom out
- o Call the poison center immediately at 1-800-222-1222

Avoiding Snakebite

Snakes are generally secretive and nonaggressive, so preventing snakebite requires only common sense actions. Recognize snake habitat: brushy, wooded, overgrown or rocky areas create protective cover where snakes can hide and where they seek their prey. When in these areas look carefully before putting your feet down, or placing your hand near any hiding spot. Wear leather ankle-high boots when walking in snake habitat.

VIRGINIA SNAKE BITES

CONTINUED

Facts About Virginia Snakes

Few creatures are as hated and feared as the snake. Learning facts about these animals may help to develop a more realistic view of the relatively low risk they pose to humans.

- o Snakebite is not a significant cause of death in the United States. Less than 15 people have died from snakebite in Virginia in the last thirty years.
- o Not every bite from a poisonous snake will result in the release of venom into the victim: nearly 25% of the bites are “dry”.
- o The venom of a young snake is identical to that of the adult snake, so a bite from a baby snake can be just as dangerous as from a fully-grown snake.
- o Sometimes people try to capture a snake that has bitten someone, thinking that the doctor will need to see it in order to treat the victim. This is not necessary! The same anti-venom may be used to treat a serious bite from any of Virginia’s poisonous snakes.
- o The easiest way to recognize a poisonous snake is by noticing the shape of the pupil of its eye. Pit vipers have elliptical-shaped pupils, like a cat. The non-poisonous snakes of Virginia all have round pupils, like humans.

If you do see a snake, simply move slowly away from it. Teach children to respect snakes and to NEVER try to touch ANY wild animal.

The VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries publishes an excellent booklet with color photographs of all of Virginia’s native snake species, and information on their habitats and distribution. You can contact them in Richmond at (804) 367-1000 to request a copy of this informative brochure.

For more information , please visit our website www.vapoison.org

Virginia Poison Center

VCU Medical Center

PO Box 980522

Richmond, VA 23298

(804) 828-9123 local line

1-800-222-1222 for emergency