

California Snakes

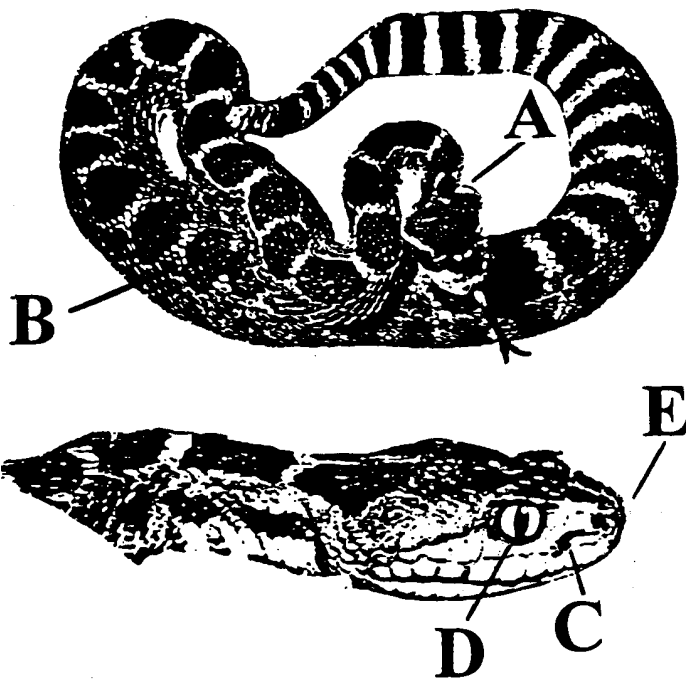
Venomous and Non-Venomous

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Venomous

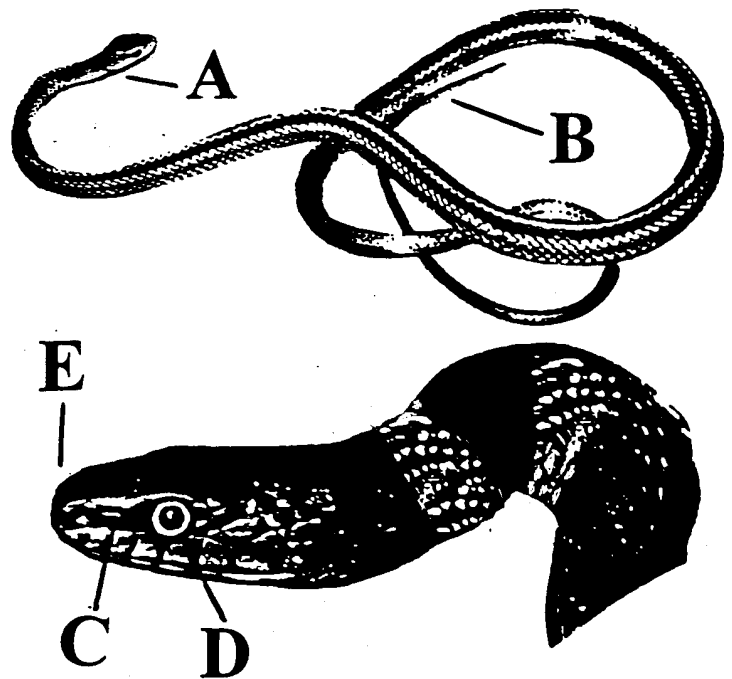
Southern Pacific Rattlesnake



- A — Triangular-shaped head is larger than neck
- B — Thick, heavy body with blunt tail and rattle
- C — Loreal pit between nostril and eye
- D — Elliptical (or cat's eye) iris openings
- E — Turned up nose

Non-Venomous

Gopher Snake/King Snake



- A — Narrow head is about same size as neck
- B — Slender body with long, tapered tail
- C — Absence of loreal pit between nostril and eye
- D — Circular iris opening
- E — Smooth, round nose

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IDENTIFICATION

Telling venomous (poisonous) snakes from non-venomous in California is easy, because there is only one type of venomous snake in California; the rattlesnake.

There are six species of rattlers in California, but all have the characteristics described below, on the left. All other snakes in California are not dangerously venomous (a couple of species have very mild venoms that do not affect humans, and most fit the conformation of the figure on the right. All snakes, venomous or otherwise, are important members of the natural community, and are vital to the balance of nature. No snake should be needlessly killed.

Venomous

Rattlesnake

Head broad, triangular-shaped

Heavy-bodied or "fat" in appearance

Tail ends in cluster of modified scales – the rattle



Non-Venomous

Gopher Snake

Head narrow, barely distinguishable from neck

Body relatively thin or narrow

Tail long, thin, tapering to a point usually — NEVER with rattles

