



# Wildlife NOTES

## Avoiding Snake Bites

Snakes provide important balance within their ecosystems. They are generally shy creatures who will make every effort to stay out of your way. Still it is wise to be cautious around any snake and to keep children and pets away from snakes too.

Whether it is a trail walk in a national park or a half day hike into the wilderness, we need to remember that we are entering shared territory. Education is the key to understanding, to preserving and to enjoying the marvels that surround us.

It is important to be able to recognize various species of snakes and become familiar with their habits and habitats on your wilderness journey. Nearly all snakes avoid humans, if possible. Most snake bites are the result of a surprise encounter. Snake-bite accidents can occur when you step on them, walk too close, agitate or threaten one - even if unintentionally.

Since snakes are active only during warmer months, they present little danger in winter months when they are dormant.



**Dress appropriately.** In warmer months, wear boots – at least ankle high – with heavy pants and a long-sleeved shirt. Although only some snakes can bite through cloth, it will interfere with the injection of the venom if the snake is poisonous.

**Do not use your hands to look under logs, in deep grass or dead trees.**

Instead, take a hiking stick with you or find a strong tree branch that will allow you to explore these places without putting your hands and arms in places where snakes could be.

**Do not make quick movements around snakes.** If you encounter a snake, remember not to make sudden movements. Many snakes do not have good eyesight (especially when ready to shed their skins) and rely on the quick movements of prey species to locate them. A snake may not realize that your hand or foot is part of something bigger that it would not consider food. Watching the snake at all times, slowly back away until a few yards distance is between you and the snake, then get out of the area.

### *How to Make a Hiking Stick*

*Getting children involved in nature projects is not only time well-spent together but also provides the opportunity to pass on your values of care and compassion for all living creatures.*

You'll need:

- A broom handle with metal tip
- Paint or wood stain
- Leather or nylon strip
- Elastic bandage
- Decorations

Cut the broom handle long enough to reach from the ground to your shoulder. Drill a hole about 3 inches from the top for the strap. Paint or stain your stick and allow it to dry.

Pull the leather or nylon strip through the hole and tie it to make a loop. Mark off inches from the stick's end in order to measure the depth of creeks. Make a hand grip by wrapping the elastic bandage around the stick.

Now attach ornaments. Some are practical, like a compass, a whistle or cluster of jingling bells to warn wildlife that you nearby. Some are just fun, like ribbons or beads strung on leather laces, or even souvenirs.

All you need now is a song in your heart and a friend to hike by your side!