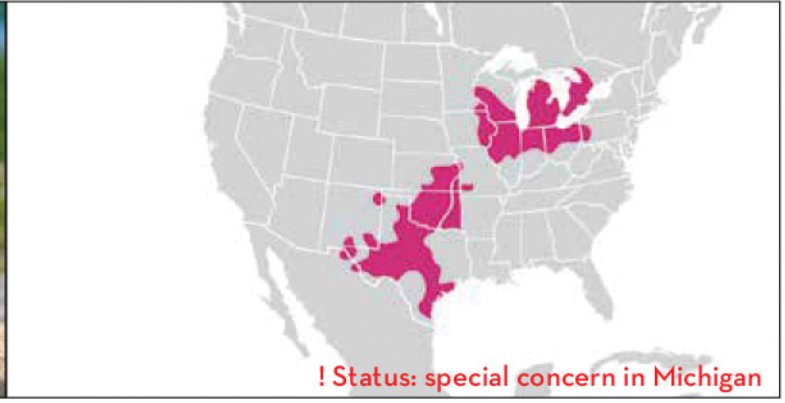


# MASSASAUGA RATTLESNAKE

updated March 2017



|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>Range</b>          | Found throughout the central United States, from southern Canada to western Arizona, south to the Gulf Coast of Texas, and east to Pennsylvania  |
| <b>Habitat</b>        | Usually found in damp lowland habitats, including bottomland forests, swamps, bogs, fens, marshes, sedge meadows, and wet prairies   |
| <b>Diet (wild)</b>    | Small mammals such as voles, white-footed mice, jumping mice, and shrews; sometimes eat snakes, frogs, birds, bird eggs, and insects   |
| <b>Diet (captive)</b> | Dead rodents   |
| <b>Description</b>    | Length: 24–36 inches. Stout, thick bodied snake. Grayish-brown with dark, blotchy pattern on the back. A well-developed rattle is present; newborns have a single button rattle.   |
| <b>Lifespan</b>       | Captivity: 20 years  |
| <b>Reproduction</b>   | Ovoviviparous, the female “gives birth” to 8–19 young. Babies stay with the mother for a few days until they shed their first skin, perhaps benefiting from her protection. Females become gravid (pregnant) every other year.   |
| <b>Behavior</b>       | Massasauga rattlesnakes are shy, reclusive snakes and only seem dangerous because they frequent woodpiles and barns in search of food. Most Eastern Massasauga rattlesnakes are hesitant to strike unless seriously harassed. In winter, unlike other rattlesnake species, they hibernate individually. Massasauga rattlesnakes take cover using crayfish tunnels and rodent burrows as deep as 6 feet (2 meters). In the spring, when days are around 70° F (21° C) and nights stay above 40° F (4° C), they begin to stick their heads above ground. As the head warms, it circulates the warming blood through the rest of the body. The process can take a few hours or a few days.  |
| <b>Our animals</b>    | 1 female. Born: 2016   |
| <b>Cool stuff</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The name “Massasauga” means “great river mouth” in the Chippewa language.</li> <li>• Massasauga rattlesnakes have potent venom but relatively short fangs that often fail to penetrate clothing and deliver only small amounts of venom with each bite.</li> <li>• Most venomous snakes deliver a “dry” bite when striking defensively. They will often inject very little or no venom at all in order to save it for killing prey, since it can take up to a week for their venom reserves to replenish after a bite.</li> <li>• Like all pit vipers, Massasauga rattlesnakes have heat-sensing organs, “pits,” on either side of their head that can detect the body heat of their warm-blooded prey.</li> <li>• Vipers all have enlarged, hollow fangs at the front of their mouth which are used to inject a modified saliva into their prey. This saliva is venomous and causes their prey to die. The gaping of the mouth as they bite causes the fangs to swing forward, jabbing the prey, then muscles in their head inject the venom.</li> <li>• New rattle segments are added each time rattlesnakes shed their skin, and conventional wisdom says that by counting the rattles, you can estimate how old a snake is. However, rattle segments are often broken off, so even if a snake has eight rattle segments, it may be more than eight-years-old.</li> <li>• Massasauga rattlesnakes are sometimes confused with eastern timber rattlesnakes, which have tails that are almost completely black. Massasauga rattlesnakes have striped tails.</li> <li>• Young Massasauga rattlesnakes entice frogs and toads to come closer by twitching their tail tips.</li> <li>• Massasauga rattlesnakes are very important in controlling rodent populations throughout their range.</li> <li>• Research on rattlesnake venom has helped develop new medical technologies to treat heart conditions and other diseases.</li> </ul> |

**Phylum**  
Chordata

**Class**  
Reptilia

**Order**  
Squamata

**Family**  
Viperidae

**Genus**  
Sistrurus

**species**  
*S. catenatus catenatus*