



# Snakes

of Monmouth County



Garter Snake

[www.MonmouthCountyParks.com](http://www.MonmouthCountyParks.com)

**F**ew animals produce as much apprehension in people as snakes do. Perhaps it is their unblinking stare, forked tongue, or the way they slither across the ground. Whatever the reason, snakes have paid a high price for our fear. However, it is possible to change this fear into understanding through education. People can then learn to appreciate snakes for the important role they play in our environment.



Park System Naturalists give snake demonstrations throughout the year at programs and events. This Corn Snake was on display at Earth Day, held at the Manasquan Reservoir.

## Frequently Asked Questions About Snakes

### How fast can snakes move?

Snakes may look as if they move fast, but they actually move rather slowly— 6 miles per hour at the most. Snakes also become sluggish in cold temperatures.

### How long can snakes be?

Some snakes can grow quite long, but New Jersey's longest snake grows no larger than 8 feet. The average length of most snakes is 2-3 feet, but their shape makes them seem longer.

### I saw a snake in my yard. Is it dangerous?

Unless touched or cornered, snakes will generally try to flee from human contact. This is also true for New Jersey's two venomous species, the Northern Copperhead and the endangered Timber Rattlesnake. However, you should never attempt to pick up a snake, since it will bite to defend itself.

### Are snakes slimy and cold?

Snakes are dry to the touch and their scales generally feel smooth. Like all reptiles, body temperature varies with the weather. They could feel cold or warm. The correct term for this is ectothermic, rather than "cold blooded."

### Can snakes hear sounds?

In a way, yes. Snakes do not have external ears, but do respond to ground vibration. It is not clear if they can pick up airborne sounds.

### Why does a snake stick out its tongue? And why is it forked?

Snakes flick their tongues to gather chemical traces (tastes). The tongue is then inserted into two pits on the roof of the mouth called the Jacobson's organ where it is analyzed. The tongue is forked to help the snake pinpoint the direction of the chemical trace

The Monmouth County Park System has two environmental centers dedicated to nature education. Each has a trained staff of naturalists to answer visitor questions and a variety of displays, exhibits, and hands-on activities where visitors of all ages can learn about area wildlife and natural history.

The **Huber Woods Environmental Center**, on Brown's Dock Road in Middletown, features exhibits about birds, plants, wildlife and the Lenape Indians. Make sure to visit the colorful Reptile House, where a variety of snakes, turtles and frogs are on display. Miles of surrounding trails offer many opportunities to enjoy and view nature.



The **Manasquan Reservoir Environmental Center**, on Georgia Tavern Road in Howell specializes in wetland species. The center has many water-related displays and exhibits to learn about local plants and wildlife. The 5-mile perimeter trail is a great place to explore and enjoy nature.



## Types of Snakes

- **Colubrids:** the largest and most common group, an example of which is the garter snake.
- **Pit Vipers:** all members are venomous. Named for heat sensing pits on their face, examples include the rattlesnake and copperhead.
- **Elapids:** the highly venomous coral snake, not found in New Jersey, is the most common member.

## Evolution

Snake evolution is not fully understood but it is thought that they developed from lizards between 100-130 million years ago. Over time, snakes lost their limbs and their bodies/organs elongated.



Visitors to Outdoor Expo, held each spring in Turkey Swamp Park, get up close and personal with a snake

## Snakes of Monmouth County

New Jersey is home to 23 species of snakes; 18 of these live in Monmouth County. Venomous species such as the endangered Timber Rattlesnake, found in Northern NJ and the Pine Barrens region, and the Northern Copperhead, found in more mountainous regions, are not generally found in Monmouth County.

One of the most common snakes in this area is the **Eastern Garter Snake** (18- 51 inches). This very adaptable snake is found in a wide range of habitats, including backyards. It hunts a variety of prey, from earthworms to frogs, and is known for giving birth to 10-30 (or more!) live young.



Garter Snake

The **Black Rat Snake** (34-101 inches) is Monmouth County's longest snake, growing up to 8 feet. It lives in woods and meadows and is an adept climber. As the name implies, it feeds on rats and other rodents.



Black Rat Snake

**Northern Water Snake** (22-53 inches) is found in ponds and wetlands. It is often seen hunting for fish and frog or basking in the sun to regulate its body temperature, as all reptiles must do. The Water Snake is often confused with the venomous Cottonmouth (or Water Moccasin), which is not found in New Jersey.



Water Snake

**Northern Brown (DeKay's) Snake** (9-20 inches) is also quite common. It can be found in swamps, moist woods, and even in urban and suburban areas. Like the Garter Snake, the Brown Snake eats a variety of prey.



DeKay's Brown Snake  
(John Mosseso/NBII.gov)

**The Northern Black Racer** (34-77 inches) is a large and common snake of open fields and broken woodlands. It feeds on rodents, birds, frogs, and other small animals.

Other local snakes not described here include the "Coastal Plain" Milk, Eastern Smooth Earth, Eastern Hognose, Eastern Ribbon Snake, Eastern King-snake, Eastern Milk, Eastern Worm, Northern Pine, Northern Redbelly, Northern Ringneck, Northern Scarlet, Southern Ringneck, and Rough Green.



Green Snake



Ribbon Snake