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Crook County

Being Snake Savvy In Crook County

Snakes are out and about now that the weather is warming up. The sentiment “the only good snake is a dead snake” is one that is repeated frequently. This article is not written by a snake lover; it comes more from a place of fear and loathing. However, I do understand snakes possess qualities that make them an important part of the ecosystem. Snakes help maintain balance in the food web. Snakes can be both predator and prey. When a large prey population attracts and sustains a large snake population, those snakes become prey for birds, mammals, and even other snakes. Snakes help keep populations of mice and voles in check too.

According to my research, Wyoming is home to 16 snake species, six of these reside in Crook County. Not all of those species are found in all parts of the county. I grew up near Alva in the northeastern corner of Crook County and there were four kinds of snakes; the garter snake, blue racer, bullsnake, and of course, rattlesnake. In Sundance, much to my dismay, there seems to be several other varieties such as the smooth green snake and eastern yellow-belly racer. The Barnyards and Backyards article “Know Your Neighbors” from the Fall 2022 publication has descriptors of several of these snakes as well as pictures as a reference guide. The prairie rattler is the only venomous snake in Crook County and you will know it by the sound of its tail rattle if you get too close. This is one you want to stay away from. While there are some stories that rattlesnakes are being born without rattles, it is false. You might not always hear the rattle before a strike, but it is there. Additionally, you might think you hear a rattle and it might just be a grasshopper, or a bullsnake doing an impersonation. It’s good to always have your guard up when you are in snake territory.

It's imperative to always be aware that snakes can be anywhere and they are often lying in wait, just looking for the opportunity to give humans a good heart attack. Snakes will travel from their homes to water sources, especially when it gets hot and dry in the summer months. I grew up in a house between the wallrock cliffs and the river, and there were often rattlesnakes in the road, or the yard, under a bush, or down at the river. It is important to teach kids the sound of a rattle and the color of a rattlesnake versus the brighter, often larger bullsnake. Knowing the places that snakes might be sunning themselves or hunting is critical in our area.

Ways to be snake savvy:

- Don’t reach into log piles or under rocks or anywhere you can’t see.
- Hands, feet, and ankles are the most common sites for rattlesnake bites.

- Take care when walking through tall grass.
- Keep grain, grass seed, or other things that will attract mice in storage containers to minimize snakes in outbuildings.
- Wear long pants and tall leather boots when walking in areas that are snake habitats, while fencing, or hiking in the hills. Never go barefoot or wear sandals when walking in snake territory.
- Keep yard grass short so that snakes are easily visible.
- Don't attempt to handle the snakes! Even dead ones! The muscles can keep moving for several hours and the head can reflexively bite and inject venom.
- If you need to remove the snake, use long implements such as a rake, shovel, or sturdy branch. If it's a rattlesnake, just leave it alone! More snake bites happen from people attempting to be a snake handler.
- If you are bitten, go to the emergency room immediately. Do not attempt home remedies for snake bite. These often cause more harm than the bite itself and is more likely to kill you or leave you disfigured than the bite itself.

It's possible to live in harmony with snakes, but it is important to do your part to keep yourself, children, and animals safe from snakebite.