

Sharing the parks with Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake



Oakland County Parks provides critical habitat to a wide variety of wildlife including the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake. Michigan Massasauga populations are rapidly declining due to habitat loss and fragmentation, human persecution or indiscriminant killing, and illegal collection.

In Michigan, the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake (EMR) is a “**species of special concern.**” It is protected from harm by an order of the Director of the Department of Natural Resources (PA 451 – 10/12/01). *It is unlawful to kill, take, trap, and possess this species. Violation of this order is a crime punishable by law.*

Massasauga ID 101:

- The EMR is Michigan’s only venomous snake.
- It may be recognized by the rattle at the end of its tail. It has a large triangular head with a neck that leads to a thicker body.
- On average adults measure only two-three feet in length.
- Massasauga are very camouflaged. A pattern of dark somewhat rectangular patches on its back and sides over a grayish - grayish brown background help the snake hide.

Snake behaviors:

- The Massasauga is a shy and secretive snake that will generally retreat if given a chance. They are not aggressive. When threatened they may remain motionless and sound their rattle as a warning. This *does not* mean they are going to strike and if given the chance they will move away.
- If harassed, the Massasauga will strike.

Guest behaviors:

- DO NOT pick up, harass or threaten the snake. Keep all pets away from these snakes; dogs should be on a six-foot leash.
- Leave the snake alone and allow it to retreat.
- Contact parks staff to move snakes – if needed.

In case of a bite:

- If you or your pet receive a bite, remain calm and seek medical or veterinary care immediately. Park guests should call 911 if they are bitten.
- Not all bites contain venom. “Dry bites” or venom-less bites happen about 25 percent of the time.
- Snakes perform beneficial ecological services and they are important members of wildlife communities.