

# Animal Info

Species Facts for  
Sandy Creek Nature  
Center's Exhibit and  
Program Animals

# American Toad

## *Bufo americanus*



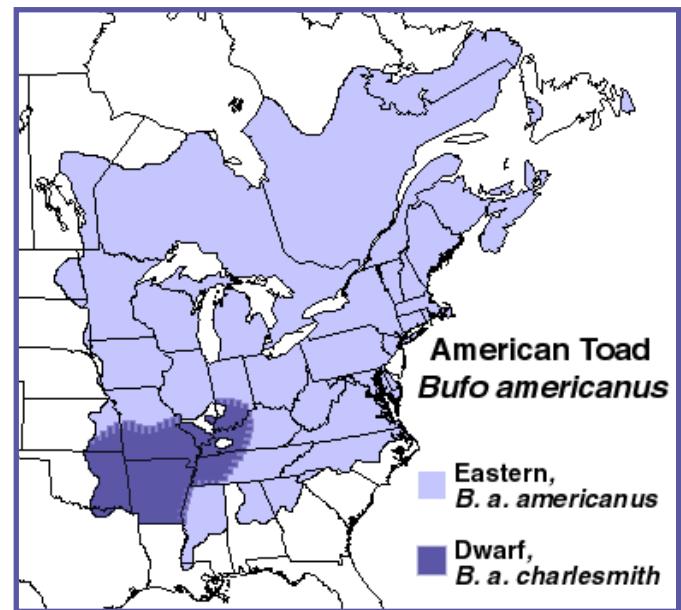
**Range and Habitat:** American toads are found from Canada to the Georgia piedmont and west to Oklahoma. They commonly inhabit woodlands, floodplains, fields, and even residential areas.

**Diet:** Earthworms, insects, and other small arthropods

**Lifespan:** 5 to 10 years

**Reproduction:** American toads breed from late January through early April. Females can lay up to 20,000 eggs. Tadpoles take about 2 months to develop into “toadlets” (young toads), and they reach reproductive maturity after 2 to 3 years.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** These toads are most active around dusk and spend most of the day hiding in burrows or under objects. They also pass the coldest parts of the winter and the hot, dry summer in their burrows. Toads can inflate with air to deter predators or secrete an irritating substance through their skin as a defense mechanism. These toxins are present in the toad’s eggs, then are lost or reduced in tadpoles, and regained as an adult toad. Nevertheless, they are sometimes consumed by hognose, garter, and water snakes, as well as raccoons, striped skunks, herons, and hawks. Toadlets can lighten or darken their skin slightly to blend in with their surroundings.



# Bearded Dragon

## *Pogona vitticeps*



**Range and Habitat:** Sometimes called the Central or Inland bearded dragon, this species is native to the arid or semiarid interior of Australia. They are found in both woodland and desert habitats.

**Diet:** Various plants, insects, and small animals including rodents and other lizards

**Lifespan:** Up to 10 years in captivity

**Reproduction:** These lizards are thought to reach sexual maturity after 1 or 2 years.

Breeding occurs in the spring following a courtship ritual, and males will behave aggressively towards each other at this time of year. Clutches of 10-30 eggs are laid in shallow sand nests, and the young lizards hatch approximately 60 to 80 days later.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** Bearded dragons are excellent climbers. They spend much of the day sunning themselves on branches, rocks, and fenceposts, retreating to underground burrows or shady spots during the hottest part of the afternoon. They will also pass the winter underground in a state similar to hibernation. Communication consists of color displays, posture, leg waving, beard inflating, and various head bobbing gestures. Though they are not social animals, bearded dragons will sometimes group together (especially during mating season), with dominant lizards occupying the best basking sites. When threatened, they flatten their bodies, gape their mouths, and produce a hissing sound.



# Black Rat Snake

*Elaphe obsoleta*



**Range and Habitat:** Black rat snakes inhabit much of the eastern U.S. and range as far west as Texas. They may be encountered in woodlands, wetlands, agricultural areas, and suburban environments.

**Diet:** Rodents, birds & bird eggs, lizards, and frogs

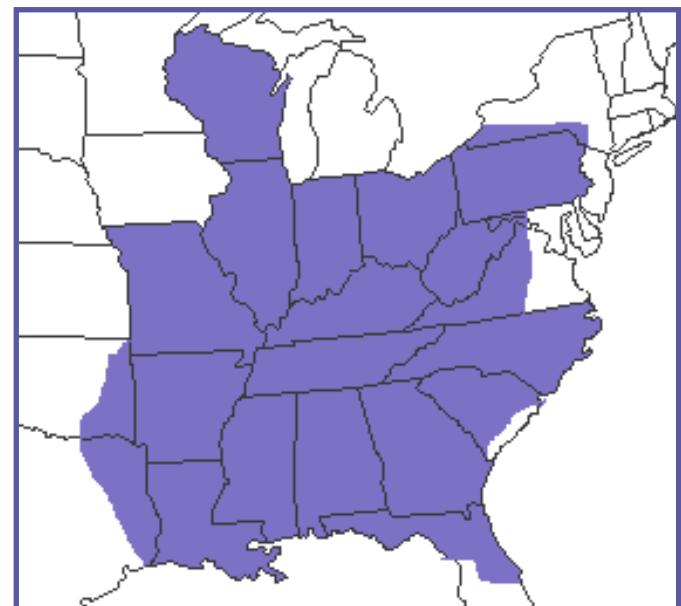
**Lifespan:** Up to 30 years

**Reproduction:** This species matures in about 4 years and mates in the spring; some groups of black rat snakes also breed in the fall. Males

compete for females by wrestling, then engage in mating behaviors that include biting the neck of the female. Egg clutches contain 4 to 44 eggs and are usually deposited in moist, dark locations such as tree holes and stumps. Young snakes emerge about two months later. Females sometimes nest in the same spot repeatedly, and multiple females may share a nest site.

## Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:

The black rat snake is one of three rat snake subspecies that occur in Georgia; the other two are the gray rat snake and the yellow rat snake. These animals use both sight and smell to locate prey and are excellent climbers, searching high in trees for bird nests. If threatened, they will assume a kinked body position that predators may mistake for a stick. Other defensive behaviors include producing an unpleasant musk and rattling their tails in leaf litter. Black rat snakes are most active by day and can be seen throughout the year in mild temperatures.



# Blue-Tongued Skink

## *Tiliqua gigas*



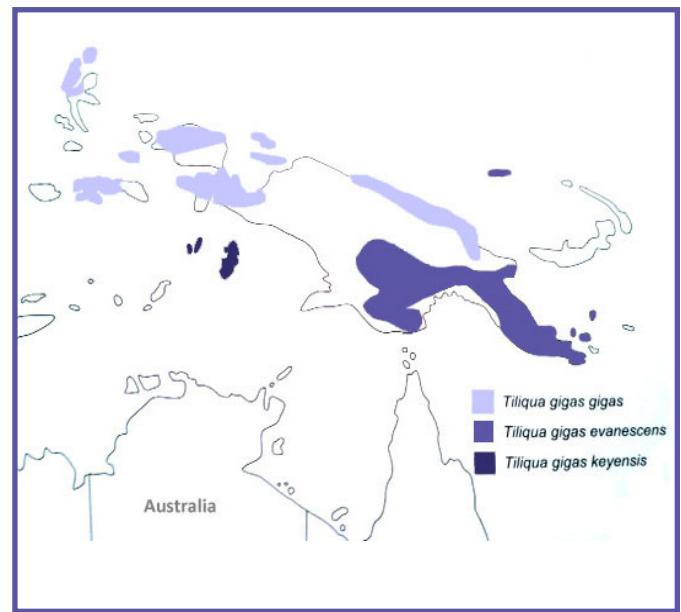
**Range and Habitat:** This species, sometimes called the Giant, New Guinea, or Indonesian blue-tongued skink, is found in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Java, and Sumatra. They inhabit warm coastal lowlands and sometimes agricultural areas.

**Diet:** Plants, arthropods, snails, smaller lizards, and carrion

**Lifespan:** Up to 17 years in captivity

**Reproduction:** Blue-tongued skinks are “ovoviparous.” This means that the eggs lack a true shell and are retained in the female skink’s body, with the young emerging live. Clutches usually contain 4 to 6 babies.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** Blue-tongued skinks are most active in the early morning, often basking in the sun. They are ground-dwelling but will occasionally attempt to climb trees by pulling themselves up with their short legs. Their tails can break off if they are threatened and will eventually re-grow. The purpose of their blue tongues is not known, though it is thought to scare away predators. The Malay-speaking people of New Guinea called them “ular kaki ampat” or “snakes with four legs” and feared that they were venomous (though they are not.) Wild populations are considered stable at this time.



# Carolina Wolf Spider

## *Hogna carolinensis*



**Range and Habitat:** Carolina wolf spiders are found throughout the U.S. as well as parts of Canada and Mexico. They may be encountered in forested areas or arid habitats like deserts.

**Diet:** Large insects and other arthropods

**Lifespan:** Females can live up to 2 years

**Reproduction:** The male spider seeks out a female during the summer months, tapping his legs in a specific pattern to avoid being perceived as a threat. The male dies soon after

mating. The following spring, the female wolf spider produces an egg sac containing around 100 to 150 eggs, carrying it around with her until the spiderlings emerge. The young spiders hitch a ride on their mother's back, holding onto specialized hairs. They eventually disperse after their first molt.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** This species is the largest wolf spider in North America, with a maximum body length of 1.5 inches and a legspan of almost four inches. They do not spin webs for hunting; instead, they run down or ambush their prey. This feeding behavior is the origin of the name "wolf spider." They are primarily nocturnal and live in silk-lined burrows that can be 5 or 6 inches deep. Their eyes are specially adapted for enhanced night vision. Although wolf spiders can bite if they are handled roughly, their venom is not dangerous to humans.



# Children's Python

## *Antaresia childreni*



**Range and Habitat:** This species inhabits north-central Australia, including the islands of the Torres Strait. They are found in habitats including savannas, open woodlands, rocky outcrops, and coastal areas.

**Diet:** Bats and other small mammals, lizards, birds, and frogs

**Lifespan:** 20 to 30 years in captivity

**Reproduction:** Mating occurs in the spring. Non-injurious combat between males has been observed during the breeding season. Females lay clutches of up to 25 eggs, which they incubate for 7 weeks by coiling around them and occasionally shivering to produce warmth.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** The Children's python was described by John Edward Gray in 1842, who named it in honour of his mentor and curator of the zoological collection at the British Museum, John George Children. These snakes are primarily nocturnal. Unlike some of the larger pythons, this species never exceeds 3 feet in length. Although they are capable climbers, they tend to prefer low shrubs and rock faces to tall trees. Children's pythons are also known to scale cave walls, which allows them to catch bats out of the air. All pythons possess labial pits, a series of openings along the upper lip that contain heat-sensing organs. They also have ventral spurs on each side of the cloaca which are used by males during mating for positioning and stimulation.



# Chinese Mantis

## *Tenodera sinensis*



**Range and Habitat:** This species has a native range that includes China, Japan, India, Thailand, and Indonesia. It was accidentally imported to Pennsylvania in 1896, and is now found throughout eastern North America and parts of the western U.S. Chinese mantids may inhabit grasslands, agricultural fields, woodlands, and gardens.

**Diet:** Insects, spiders, and small vertebrates

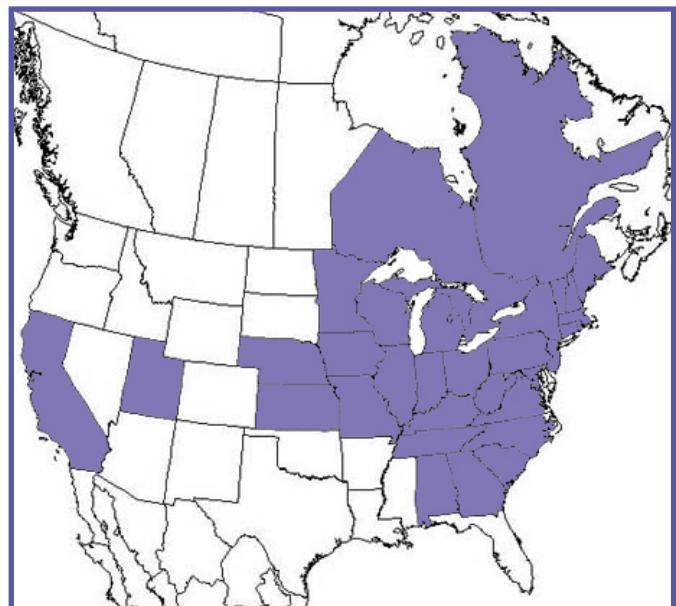
**Lifespan:** 6 to 9 months

**Reproduction:** Both male and female Chinese

mantids mate with multiple partners, and the young that emerge from a single egg case can have different fathers. The male mantis detects the female's pheromones, flies to her location, and initiates courting behavior. The male is sometimes eaten by the female during or after copulation. Female Chinese mantids produce one or more egg cases (called oothecae) that contain between 50 and several hundred eggs. Adults are killed by cold temperatures, but the oothecae overwinter and hatch the following spring.

### Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:

Chinese mantids primarily use vision to find prey but can also utilize smell. Prey animals are grasped with the mantis's forearms and quickly consumed. This species will eat anything it can catch, sometimes including other mantids, small amphibians, lizards, and hummingbirds. Starving mantids may feed on pollen to survive. Both males and females have wings, but the females do not fly. Chinese mantis oothecae are now commonly sold as "natural pest control" for gardens, though these insects consume both nuisance and beneficial organisms.



# Cope's Gray Tree Frog

## *Hyla chrysoscelis*



**Range and Habitat:** Cope's gray tree frog is found in wetland areas of the central and eastern United States. They prefer mature, deciduous forests.

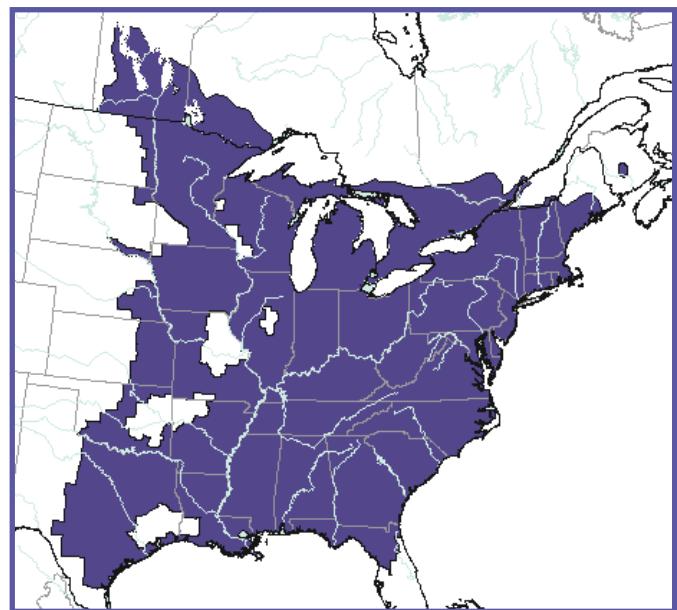
**Diet:** Insects and other small arthropods

**Lifespan:** Up to 7 years in captivity

**Reproduction:** Males begin calling for mates in March and typically complete their breeding in August. Males group together and call for females in choruses. Females lay around 20 to

40 eggs in temporary bodies of water, especially ones that do not contain fish. Eggs hatch in 4 days on average, and tadpoles complete metamorphosis in 30 to 60 days.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** Cope's gray tree frogs are nocturnal and often sleep in tree holes or on the undersides of leaves during the day. They can change their shade of gray depending on lighting, humidity, temperature and background. These frogs have a special mucus on their toes that helps them climb high into trees, where they spend much of the year. The bright yellow or orange patches on the underside of their hind legs may serve to startle or confuse predators. Like many other frog species, Cope's gray tree frogs can survive subfreezing temperatures by producing an antifreeze-like compound in their blood and body tissues. In parts of its range, *Hyla chrysoscelis* overlaps with another species, *Hyla versicolor*, that can only be distinguished by its call and genetic analysis.



# Copperhead

*Agkistrodon contortrix*



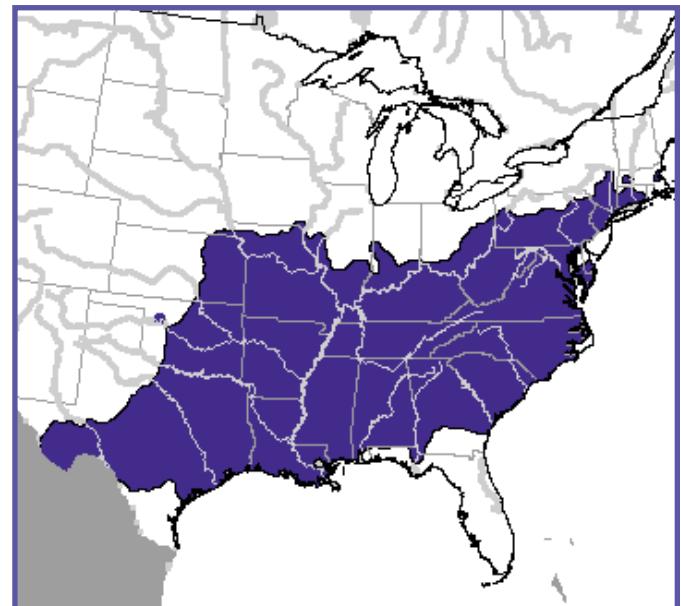
**Range and Habitat:** Copperheads live throughout the eastern and central U.S., except for Florida and much of south Georgia. Their habitat preferences vary by region and include woodlands, rocky outcrops, and wetlands. They are also found in suburban areas.

**Diet:** Rodents, birds, lizards, small snakes, amphibians, and insects

**Lifespan:** Up to 18 years

**Reproduction:** It takes about 2 to 3 years for copperheads to reach sexual maturity. These snakes breed in both the spring and fall. Males seek females by following their scent trails and will engage in ritualized combat with other males. Copperheads are *ovoviviparous*, and the females give live birth to 1-21 young.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** Copperheads are mostly nocturnal, though they may sometimes be encountered during the day. They rely on camouflage to avoid predators, including birds of prey, coyotes, and kingsnakes. Copperhead venom is the weakest of the venomous snakes in our area, and bites are almost never fatal to humans. These animals are not territorial; in parts of their range, they will hibernate communally with other copperheads and timber rattlesnakes. Juveniles prefer to eat amphibians and invertebrates, with a particular taste for cicadas. They are born with yellow-green tail tips that they wag to lure prey within striking distance. This tail coloration darkens with age.



# Corn Snake

## *Elaphe guttatus*



**Range and Habitat:** Corn snakes are native to the southeastern U.S. They inhabit woodlands (especially pine forests), grasslands, rocky hillsides, and agricultural areas.

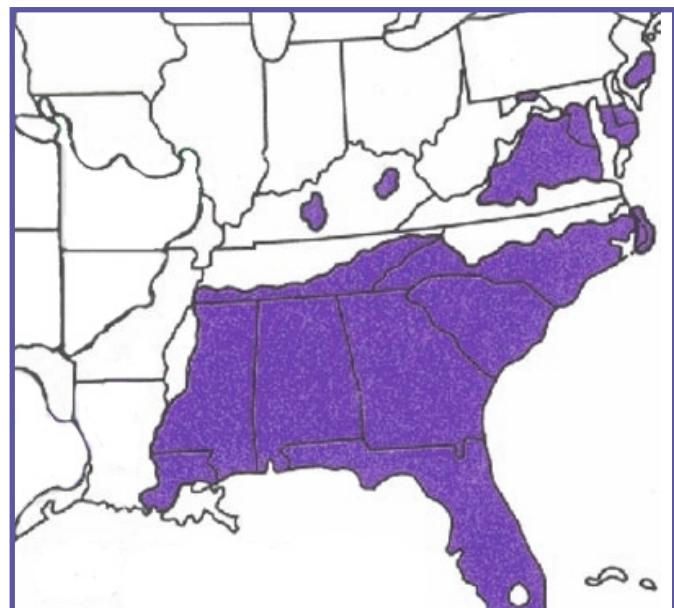
**Diet:** Rodents, birds, bats, lizards, and amphibians

**Lifespan:** 6 to 8 years in wild

**Reproduction:** Corn snakes breed from March to May; males begin seeking mates after emerging from winter dormancy. Females lay clutches of 5 to 30 eggs in warm, humid spots

such as rotting logs and piles of plant debris. The young emerge in late summer or early fall, becoming sexually mature in 1.5 to 3 years.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** Sometimes also called red rat snakes, the name “corn snake” is believed to have one of two origins: the resemblance of the belly scales to Indian corn or a reference to this species’ use of corn fields as hunting grounds for rodents. Much of their time is spent burrowing in loose soil and leaf litter. They also frequently hide in stump holes or under the bark of dead trees. Like other rat snakes, these animals are skilled climbers, using their belly scales to grip rough surfaces like tree bark. Corn snakes are constrictors, striking their prey and then coiling around the animal to suffocate it. Food is swallowed whole, usually head first. When threatened, these snakes may strike or release a smelly musk. This species is also popular in the pet trade.



# Cottonmouth

## *Agkistrodon piscivorus*



**Range and Habitat:** Cottonmouths, also known as Water Moccasins, inhabit the southeastern U.S. and Atlantic coastal plain west to Texas. They are found in or near water, especially shallow, slow-moving lakes, streams, and marshes.

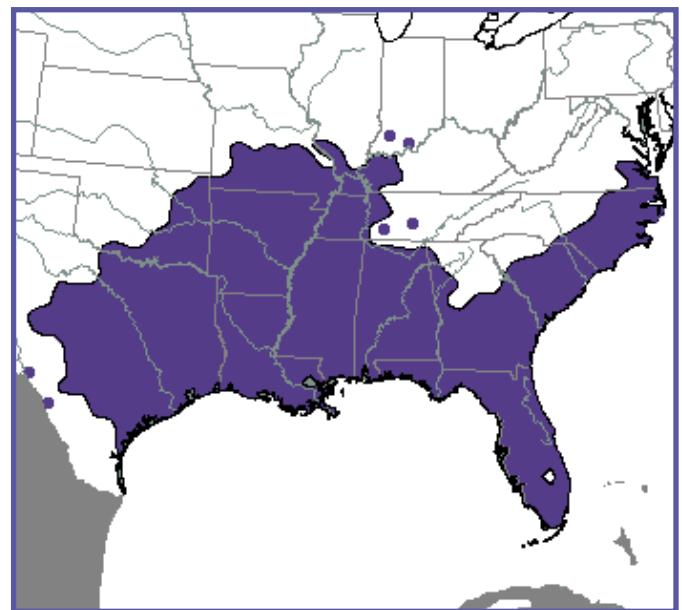
**Diet:** Fish, frogs, other vertebrates, carrion

**Lifespan:** 10 to 20 years or more

**Reproduction:** Cottonmouths become sexually mature after about 3 years. Mating most often

takes place in the fall, but it can occur throughout the year. This species is *ovoviparous*, meaning that females give birth to live young- usually 2 to 16 at a time. Individual females generally reproduce in alternating years and are able to store sperm for fertilization.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** Cottonmouths are the only species of semi-aquatic viper in the world. They are strong swimmers, even crossing stretches of salt water to colonize barrier islands. Juvenile cottonmouths have a greenish tail tip that they use for luring prey. Although they are mostly nocturnal, they may be active during the day as well. When threatened, a cottonmouth will engage in a threat display, coiling its body and gaping its mouth to reveal fangs and a white mouth lining. It may also vibrate its tail and release a nasty-smelling musk. Cottonmouth bites are extremely painful and potentially fatal; however, these snakes are unlikely to actually bite unless they are picked up.



# Diamondback Terrapin

## *Malaclemys terrapin*



**Range and Habitat:** Diamondback terrapins inhabit brackish, coastal waters of the eastern and southern U.S., including *Spartina* cordgrass marshes and mangrove swamps.

**Diet:** Snails and other marine invertebrates, fish

**Lifespan:** Up to 40 years

**Reproduction:** Female terrapins take about 5 years to mature, while males only require 3 years. Breeding spans from May to July and takes place in the water. Clutches of 7 to 12 eggs are deposited in sandy soil near marsh habitat, and hatchlings emerge 61 to 104 days later depending on temperature. Females may produce several clutches per year.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** These turtles are diurnal, and they rarely leave the water unless basking or laying eggs. Female terrapins can be up to twice the size of males; their larger and stronger jaws allow them to eat harder-shelled prey that are not accessible to males. Nest temperature determines the sex of terrapin embryos. When water temperatures dip below 50 degrees Fahrenheit, they burrow into mudflats and creek banks before entering a state of winter dormancy. Diamondback terrapin meat was once considered to be a delicacy, and these animals were almost hunted to extinction in the early 1900s. They still face threats due to coastal development and human activities.



# Eastern Box Turtle

## *Terrapene carolina carolina*



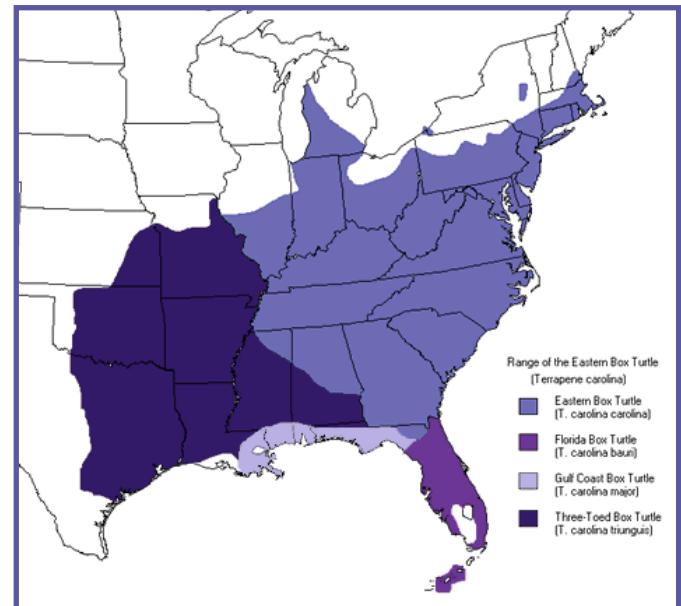
**Range and Habitat:** Eastern box turtles live in the Eastern U.S., from Maine to Florida and as far west as Oklahoma, Kansas, and Texas. Their preferred habitats include woodlands, grasslands, and floodplains.

**Diet:** Invertebrates, plants, fungi, and carrion

**Lifespan:** Up to 100 years in the wild, but 30 - 40 years in captivity

**Reproduction:** Box Turtles take between 5 and 10 years to reach sexual maturity. Mating occurs from April to June. Females lay 2 - 7 eggs in a shallow nest, and hatchling turtles emerge in late summer or early fall. Some females may produce up to 3 clutches per year.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** Eastern box turtles are named for their ability to completely enclose themselves in their shells, like a box, when threatened. Individual turtles can vary widely in color and markings. Males have a curved plastron (underside of the shell) and will often also have red eyes, colorful markings on their legs, and thicker tails than females. A flat plastron and brown eyes are typical of female box turtles. They don't swim, but they may sometimes be found soaking in shallow water. Eastern box turtles can eat poisonous mushrooms without becoming sick, and the juveniles are more carnivorous than the adults. Unfortunately, box turtle populations are declining rapidly due to roadside mortality, habitat loss, and collection for the pet trade.



# Eastern Fence Lizard

## *Sceloporus undulatus*



**Range and Habitat:** Eastern fence lizards live throughout the eastern and southern U.S. and can be found in a variety of habitats, including dry forests and rocky outcrops. They are only rarely encountered on barrier islands.

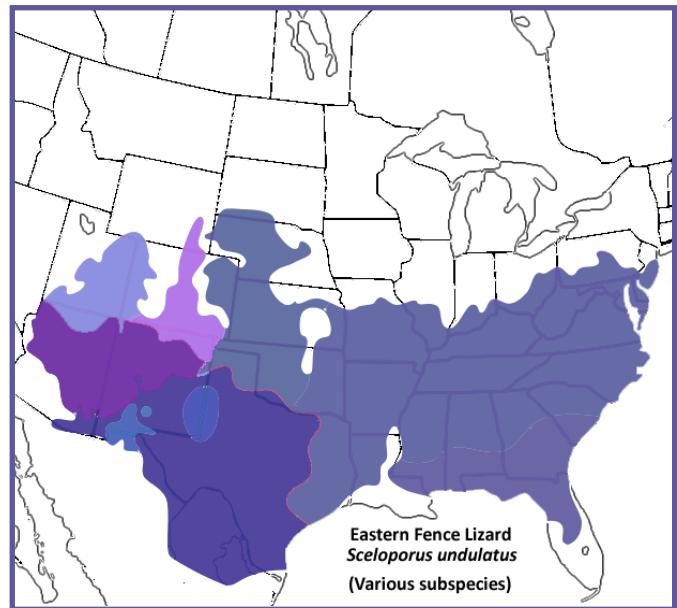
**Diet:** Insects and other small arthropods

**Lifespan:** Up to 5 years

**Reproduction:** Mating season begins in April and lasts until August. Males will establish breeding territories during this period. The eggs

are laid in damp soil or other substrate; clutches usually contain 3 to 16 eggs which will hatch in 10 weeks. Fence lizards parents do not care for their young.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** Fence lizards are agile climbers, and their coloration allows them to blend in almost perfectly against a backdrop of rocks and bark. They can frequently be seen basking in sunny spots on warm days. The males develop blue and black patches on the throat and belly during breeding season; when defending territory, they will bob their heads and do “push-ups.” To escape predators, fence lizards will dart up a tree and hide on the opposite side. Lost tails can be regrown in time. There is some evidence that Eastern fence lizards in some regions have undergone evolutionary changes in response to the introduction of Red imported fire ants, including the development of longer legs and new escape behaviors.



# Eastern Kingsnake

*Lampropeltis getula*



**Range and Habitat:** The Eastern kingsnake, a subspecies of the Common kingsnake, lives in a variety of habitats across the eastern U.S.: forests, swamps, tidal wetlands, fields, and suburban areas. They prefer areas close to water.

**Diet:** Snakes, rabbits, rodents, amphibians, lizards, and turtle eggs

**Lifespan:** Up to 9 years in the wild; over 30 years in captivity

**Reproduction:** This species mates in the spring. Males actively search for females at this time and may engage in ritualized combat with other males. The female snake lays clutches of 3 to 29 eggs in moist substrate up to two months after mating, and the eggs take an additional two months to hatch. Nest temperature determines the sex of the offspring.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** Eastern kingsnakes are active by day and commonly encountered in our area; nevertheless, they spend a majority of their time underground. These snakes are powerful constrictors, immobilizing and killing prey before swallowing it head-first. They are resistant to the venom of pit vipers and readily consume rattlesnakes, copperheads, and cottonmouths. This ability is thought to be the origin of the name "kingsnake." They are competent climbers and swimmers. When threatened, they will excrete musk and vibrate their tails. Although wild kingsnakes are likely to bite on capture, they domesticate easily and make popular pets.



# Gopher Tortoise

*Gopherus polyphemus*



**Range and Habitat:** Gopher tortoises are only found in the southeastern coastal plain of the U.S. They inhabit the longleaf pine belt and habitats with well-drained, sandy soil suitable for burrowing.

**Diet:** Various grasses, legumes, and other plants

**Lifespan:** At least 40 years

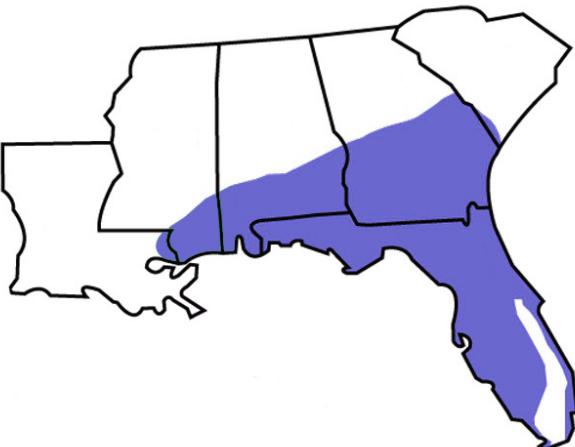
**Reproduction:** Gopher tortoises can take up to 21 years to reach sexual maturity. Mating and nesting season usually occurs in the spring following a courtship ritual. Clutches contain 5 to

7 eggs which take about 80 - 100 days to hatch. Less than 6% of eggs will survive one year.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** Gopher tortoises are the only tortoise species found in the southeast, and they are the state reptile of Georgia. They dig extensive burrows which can extend over 45 feet, and these burrows provide shelter for 360 other species of animals. Claws on their front feet are well-adapted to digging. These tortoises lead solitary lives outside of breeding season, and each one inhabits a small home range.

Males have curved plastrons (underside of the shell) with a projection on the front, and their tails are longer than females'. When disturbed, gopher tortoises will retract into their shells and hiss loudly. Doris, the nature center's resident tortoise, is approximately 30 years old. Unfortunately, this species is listed as "threatened" in Georgia, and populations are declining throughout its range, mostly due to land development and habitat fragmentation.

**Gopher Tortoise**  
*Gopherus polyphemus*



# Greater Siren

## *Siren lacertina*



**Range and Habitat:** The Greater siren is native to the Atlantic and Gulf coastal plains. They are found in permanent and seasonal wetlands, especially slow or still bodies of water with heavy vegetation and a thick layer of “muck” at the bottom.

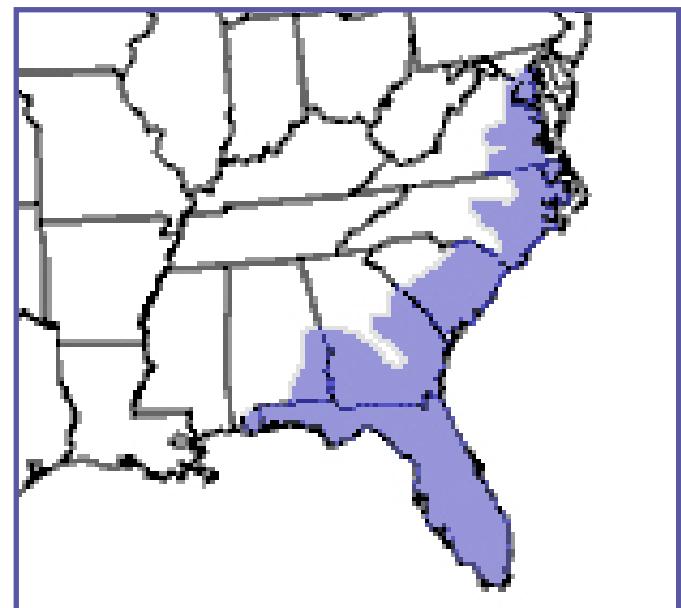
**Diet:** Aquatic invertebrates and small fish

**Lifespan:** Up to 25 years in captivity

**Reproduction:** Breeding apparently occurs in February in March, but has never been observed.

The exact method of reproduction is unknown. Eggs are laid singly or in small clutches and may be guarded by the female.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** The greater siren is completely aquatic throughout its life, able to breathe both air and water using its lungs and external gills. They lack hind limbs, and their weak forelimbs are not used for swimming. These animals hunt at night using a “lateral-line system” to locate prey, hiding beneath debris during the day. They are able to produce yelping and clicking sounds when captured. Although their slippery bodies make them very difficult to catch, they are consumed by various predators, including alligators. To survive periods of drought, a greater siren can burrow deep into mud and secrete a mucous-and-shed-skin “cocoon” that holds in moisture. Its body functions slow by 70%, and it can possibly exist in this state for over 5 years.



# Green Anole

## *Anolis carolinensis*



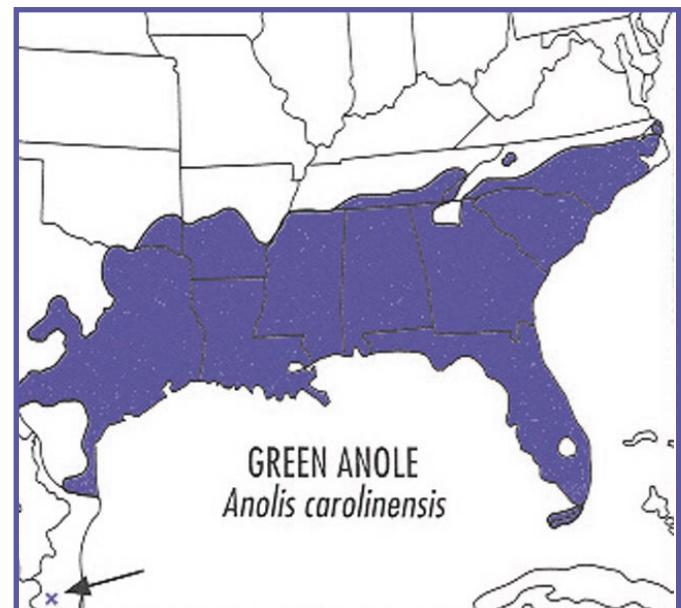
**Range and Habitat:** Green anoles are found in the southeastern U.S. and along the gulf coast. They prefer wooded areas but can be found in a variety of habitats, including urban areas.

**Diet:** Insects and other small arthropods

**Lifespan:** 2 to 8 years

**Reproduction:** Mating season spans from April to September. During this time, males select a territory and patrol it. When a female enters a male's territory, he will try to attract her by displaying a pink "dewlap" on his throat and then bobbing up and down. Female anoles store sperm and lay one egg in soft soil every 2 weeks, up to 18 eggs each year. After 30 to 45 days, the egg hatches, and the young anole must fend for itself.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** Green anoles are very territorial. They will fight other males and have even been observed trying to fight their own reflections. They have the ability to change color between different shades of green and brown depending on their mood, lighting, and temperature. Like many other types of lizards, anoles can lose their tails when threatened and eventually re-grow them. They are active during the day, and can frequently be seen basking in warm spots. During the winter, anoles often find shelter in rotting wood or under tree bark.



# Green Tree Frog

## *Hyla cinerea*



**Range and Habitat:** Green tree frogs are found in the southern U.S. and Atlantic coastal plain. They inhabit well-vegetated wetland areas, both natural and artificial.

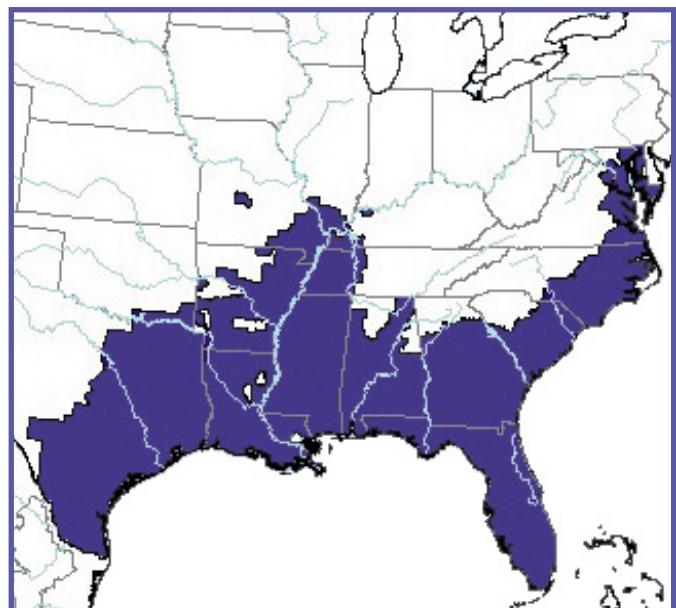
**Diet:** Insects and other small arthropods

**Lifespan:** Up to 6 years in captivity

**Reproduction:** Green tree frogs prefer to breed in permanent bodies of water. Males call for mates on warm, humid nights between April and August. The calls are repeated 80 times per minute. Females can lay up to 1,160 eggs, placing them at or below the water's surface.

The eggs hatch 2 or 3 days later and develop over the course of 5 to 9 weeks.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** Also known as the American green tree frog, this species is the state amphibian of both Georgia and Louisiana. These animals are nocturnal and spend much of their lives in trees. They are most active in wet weather. Though they are generally solitary, green tree frogs may congregate in large numbers during the breeding season. Besides mating calls, these frogs will also produce an alarm call and a specific "rain call" when precipitation is imminent. Their shade of green can change depending on lighting and temperature. Though these frogs are consumed by various snakes, birds, and other animals, their tadpoles are less palatable to fish than many other types of amphibians.



# Loggerhead Sea Turtle

## *Caretta caretta*



**Range and Habitat:** These sea turtles inhabit temperate and tropical marine environments worldwide, especially near coastlines.

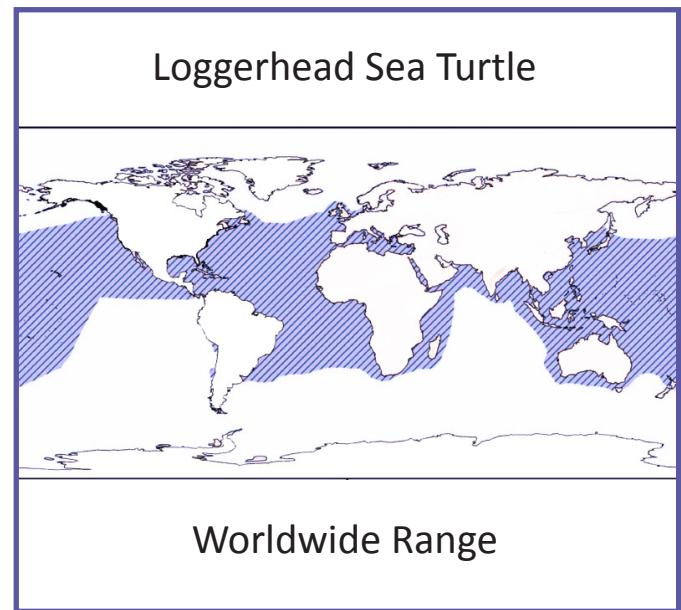
**Diet:** Marine (especially bottom-dwelling) invertebrates and some fish, algae, and plants

**Lifespan:** Up to 67 years

**Reproduction:** Loggerheads reach sexual maturity between ages 15 and 25. Females come ashore only to lay eggs, and they will return to the same area where they themselves hatched.

Nesting takes place from May to August. Clutches contain 115 to 125 eggs. Females produce 4 to 6 clutches in a season, then wait another 2 to 4 years to breed again.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** Most of a loggerhead's time is spent submerged beneath the water, where they can remain for up to 4 hours. Their powerful jaws are specialized for crushing prey, and glands behind each eye excrete excess salt from ingested seawater. Like most sea turtles, loggerheads are listed as an endangered species and protected by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Beach development, the introduction of exotic predators, and entanglement in fishing trawls have all contributed to the decline of this species. Young turtles are especially vulnerable to predation. The loggerhead at SCNC is on loan from the state Department of Natural Resources. We receive hatchling turtles, raise them to a sufficient size, then return them to the DNR for release back into the wild.



# Madagascar Hissing Cockroach

## *Gromphadorhina portentosa*



**Range and Habitat:** These cockroaches are only found on the island of Madagascar. They inhabit tropical lowland rainforests where colonies live in dry leaf litter and rotting logs.

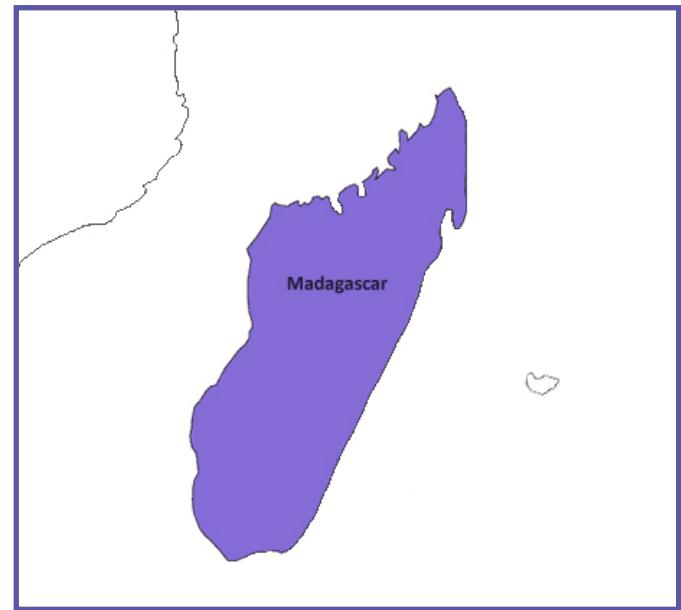
**Diet:** Decaying and live plant material, carrion, dung, small insects, fungus, and lichen

**Lifespan:** 2 to 5 years

**Reproduction:** Breeding can occur year-round in temperate weather. Males will “wrestle” one another for dominance, then perform a mating

ritual with receptive females. Egg cases (*ootheca*) are retained internally by the female until they hatch, usually in batches of 15 to 40. Cockroaches undergo “incomplete” metamorphosis; the young, called nymphs, resemble small adults but lack functioning reproductive organs until they mature at around 7 months of age.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** This wingless cockroach species is one of the largest in the world. Males possess the following characteristics: significant bumps or blunt “horns” on the front of the thorax, thicker and hairier antennae than females, and 9 visible plates on the underside of the abdomen (females only have 7.) The pads and hooks on their feet allow them to climb smooth surfaces. Their hissing sounds are produced by forcing air through their respiratory openings, called spiracles, found on each segment of the abdomen. Three types of hisses are recognized: alarm, male combat, and courtship.



# Mole Kingsnake

## *Lampropeltis calligaster*



**Range and Habitat:** Mole kingsnakes inhabit the midwestern U.S. and much of the southeast. They are found in woodlands and fields with soil suitable for burrowing.

**Diet:** Rodents, lizards, frogs, and other snakes

**Lifespan:** About 15 - 20 years

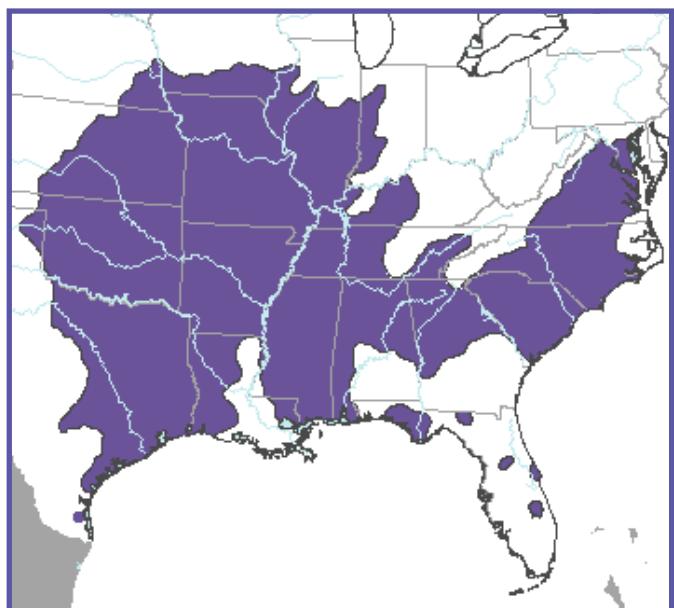
**Reproduction:** This species takes three years to reach sexual maturity. Males locate females by following pheromone trails, and breeding occurs during the spring. Female snakes lay

eggs in groups of 5 to 16 approximately one to two months after mating. Due to its secretive nature, much is unknown about the mole kingsnake's life history.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** Mole kingsnakes are rarely observed in the wild because they are nocturnal and spend most of their time underground. They may create their own burrows or use holes constructed by other animals. Individuals are

sometimes encountered in freshly-plowed agricultural fields or crossing roads. Like other kingsnakes, the mole kingsnake is a constrictor with a varied diet. Hatchlings and juveniles prefer to consume skinks.

Known predators of this species include birds of prey, raccoons, black racers, and other kingsnakes. This species bites only occasionally when handled. Mole kingsnake populations are thought to be stable; however, their reclusive tendencies make it difficult to accurately assess their abundance.



# Pine Snake

## *Pituophis melanoleucus*



**Range and Habitat:** Pine snakes occupy a patchy distribution within the southeastern U.S. They have been observed in such habitats as sandhills, scrub forest, abandoned fields, and dry mountain ridges.

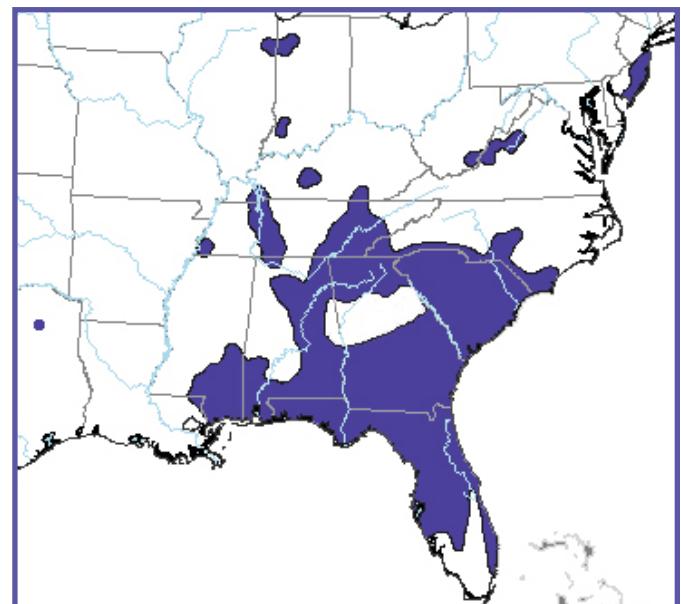
**Diet:** Rodents, birds, and bird eggs

**Lifespan:** Up to 20 years in captivity

**Reproduction:** The breeding seasons lasts from April to May, during which combat between males is common. Females lay clutches

of 3 to 27 eggs underground. In some populations, they may excavate long nesting chambers that can be utilized by multiple females and reused in subsequent years. Hatchlings emerge in September or October. Age of sexual maturity varies by region.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** Pine snakes are one of the largest snakes in the southeast, and their eggs are among the most sizable in all of North America. Though active only during the day, they are seldom observed because they spend most of their time burrowed beneath the ground. They use the burrows of other animals or dig their own. This species will also climb trees in search of bird nests. Pine snakes will engage in a number of defensive behaviors, including loud hissing, inflating their bodies, vibrating their tails in leaf litter, and striking. Two subspecies are found in Georgia: the northern pine snake (*P. m. melanoleucus*) in or near the mountains, and the Florida pine snake (*P. m. mugitus*) in the coastal plain.



# Rose Hair Tarantula

## *Grammostola rosea*



**Range and Habitat:** Also called the Chilean rose tarantula, this species inhabits the scrubland and desert of Northern Chile.

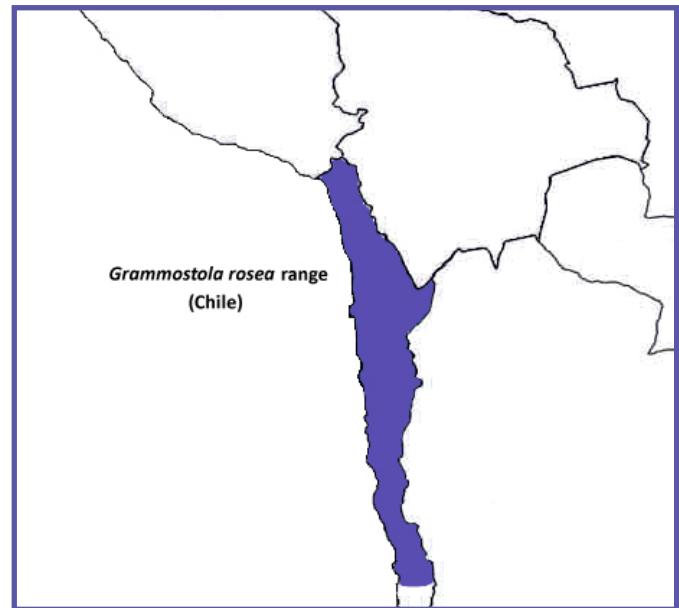
**Diet:** Insects and other arthropods; occasionally, small vertebrates

**Lifespan:** Females can live up to 20 years

**Reproduction:** Mating can occur at any time of year. A male tarantula spins a “sperm web,” places a drop of reproductive fluid on the underside, then transfers it to his pedipalps, a pair

of leg-like appendages near the front of the body. He seeks the burrow of a receptive female, and a touch-based courtship ritual ensues. The male fertilizes the female with one or both pedipalps. After about 6 weeks, the female produces an egg sac that contains between 100 and 500 eggs; she will guard it aggressively until it hatches.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** This species is the most common tarantula in the pet trade. Males have smaller bodies than females and live less than half as long. Wild rose hair tarantulas live in burrows up to 18 inches deep or hide out in above-ground retreats, emerging at night to hunt. They get moisture from droplets of fog as well as from their food. When threatened, they will flick hairs from their abdomen at an attacker. Bites from this species are extremely rare; when they do occur, the result is temporary pain and swelling that is not considered to be medically serious. At least three color forms of *G. rosea* exist and were once thought to be separate species.



# Southern Leopard Frog

## *Rana sphenocephala*



**Range and Habitat:** These frogs live in the southeastern U.S., along the Atlantic coastal plain and west to Texas. They prefer shallow, well-vegetated lakes, ponds, and creeks.

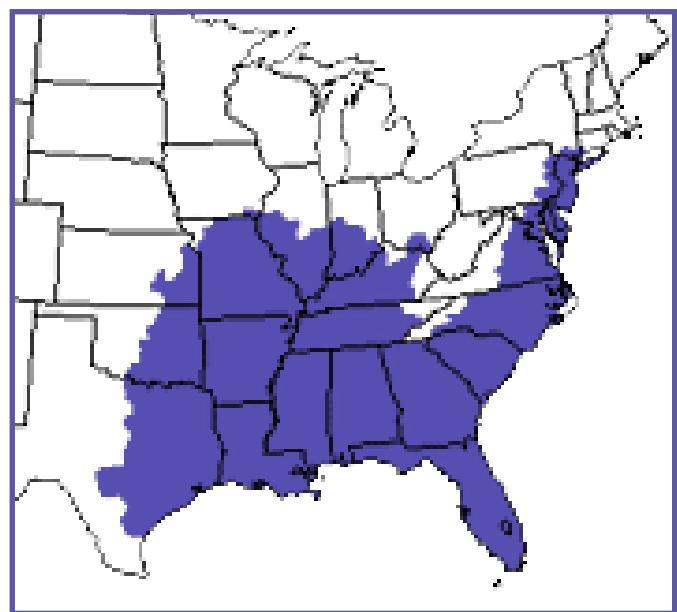
**Diet:** Insects and other invertebrates

**Lifespan:** Approximately 3 years

**Reproduction:** Leopard frogs are thought to reach sexual maturity in 1 to 2 years. They can breed throughout the year in mild temperatures. Males call for females from the shoreline or

while floating in shallow water, and they are able to fertilize 7,000 to 10,000 eggs at a time. Females deposit clutches of several hundred eggs beneath the water's surface, up to a total of 4,000 eggs per season. The tadpoles eat algae and decaying plant material; it takes at least 90 days for a tadpole to complete metamorphosis.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** The southern leopard frog is most active at night. "Leopard" refers to its spotted coloration. These frogs are excellent jumpers, able to leap up to 4 feet. To escape predators, they will dive into water, swim for a distance, then bury themselves. If a habitat offers enough moisture and vegetation, leopard frogs may wander away from water. In the past, this species was used as a human food source ("frog legs") and for dissection in some science classes. They are closely related to the Northern leopard frog, *Rana pipiens*, which is a larger species with more spots.



# Spiny Softshell

## *Apalone spinifera*



**Range and Habitat:** Spiny softshell turtles occupy the central-eastern U.S., south to Mexico. They inhabit rivers and streams with muddy or sandy bottoms as well as large lakes and reservoirs.

**Diet:** Invertebrates, fish, and anything that will fit in its mouth

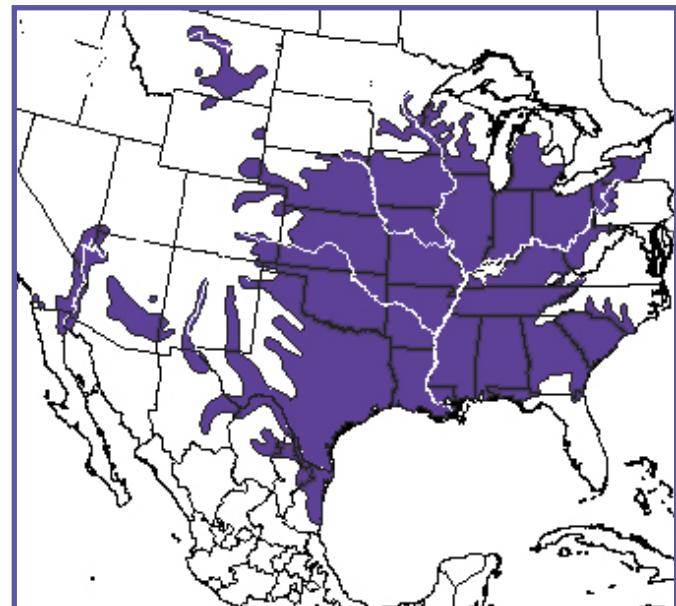
**Lifespan:** Estimated at up to 50 years

**Reproduction:** Spiny softshells reach sexual maturity when they are 8 to 10 years old.

Breeding takes place during May and June. Females lay between 12 and 40 eggs on sandbars or in loose soil near water. Hatching usually occurs in August or September, but clutches of eggs sometimes incubate through the winter and hatch the following spring.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** These turtles possess shells that are flat and leathery, with flexible edges that may include a variable number of spiny projections. Females can be twice the size of males. There

are other physical differences between the sexes; males have larger tails and olive or tan-colored shells with distinct eye-spots, while the female's shell is darker and blotchier. They are active during the day, though they spend much of their time buried in mud or sand with only their heads exposed, sleeping or waiting for prey to pass by. Spiny softshells will also occasionally bask on sandbars or logs. They breathe air but can also absorb oxygen through their skin and throat/ cloacal linings, allowing them to spend up to 5 hours underwater.



# Eastern Tiger Salamander

*Ambystoma tigrinum*



**Range and Habitat:** The tiger salamander's range includes much of the U.S., as well as southern Canada and northern Mexico. It is absent from most of the Great Basin, New England, and the Appalachian mountains. Habitat varies from forests to grasslands to marshy areas.

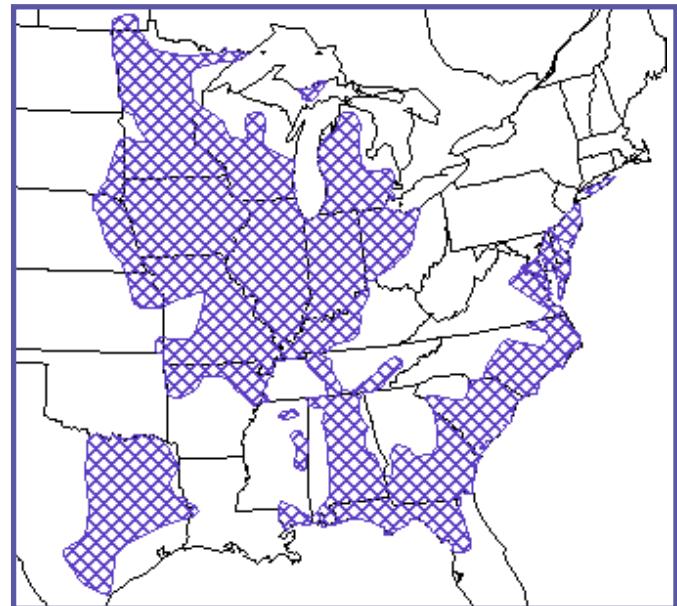
**Diet:** Invertebrates and occasionally tadpoles, fish, or smaller salamanders

**Lifespan:** Up to 20 years in captivity

**Reproduction:** The breeding season begins in late winter or early spring after the ground begins to thaw. Males deposit spermatophores on rocks or logs underwater, and females pick up the packet to complete fertilization. During courtship, males sometimes impersonate females, sneaking in to deposit a spermatophore on top of a rival male's. A female can produce between 13 and 110 eggs at a time, up to 1,000 per season. The larvae are aquatic, eventually developing into terrestrial adults. Tiger salamanders can reach sexual maturity in less than a year.

## Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:

Tiger salamanders are the largest land-dwelling salamanders in North America (individuals can grow up to 14 inches long), and they are also the most widespread. These animals are nocturnal and spend most of the year underground in burrows that they dig themselves, up to 2 feet deep. Various subspecies and forms exist, including a cannibalistic larval morph. Some populations never metamorphosize, and become sexually mature while retaining their larval characteristics.



# Timber Rattlesnake

## *Crotalus horridus*



**Range and Habitat:** Timber rattlesnakes have a range that includes parts of the northeast and southeast, as well as much of the central U.S. They inhabit cane thickets, floodplains, woodlands, and mountainous regions.

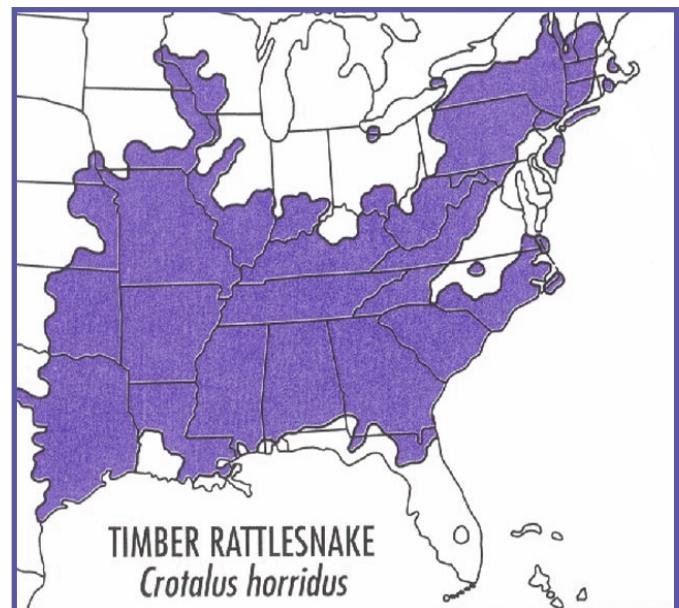
**Diet:** Small mammals and birds

**Lifespan:** 16 to 22 years

**Reproduction:** Female timber rattlesnakes do not lay eggs; instead, they give birth to live young. Populations found in the mountains

take longer to mature (about 8 years) and produce fewer offspring (8 on average) than populations in the coastal plain (6 years to mature and 12 offspring.) Mating takes place from August to October. Timber rattlesnake mothers remain with their young until their first shed, approximately 1 to 2 weeks after birth.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** A timber rattlesnake's coloration provides excellent camouflage, allowing it to lie in wait and ambush prey. This species has potent venom but will generally avoid confrontation when possible, rattling its tail to warn off threats. A new rattle segment is added each time a rattlesnake sheds. These animals hibernate in winter, communally in the mountains and alone in the coastal plain. A subspecies called the canebrake rattlesnake was once recognized, but it was shown to be genetically indistinguishable from other timber rattlers. Populations are declining in many areas.



# Western Hognose

*Heterodon nasicus*



**Range and Habitat:** Western hognose snakes are native to south-central Canada, the Great Plains states, and northern Mexico. They are generally found in dry prairies or oak savannahs.

**Diet:** Frogs & toads, rodents, lizards, birds, snakes, and reptile eggs

**Lifespan:** Approximately 8 years in the wild and 15 years in captivity

**Reproduction:** This species takes about two years to reach sexual maturity. Females only reproduce in alternating years, laying clutches of 3 to 23 eggs in nests a few inches below ground. These eggs are usually deposited between May and August, and hatching occurs two months later.

**Behavior and Other Interesting Facts:** Western hognoses are active during the day from March or April through September; they pass the winter hibernating in mammal burrows. In order to contend with predators such as hawks, crows, and coyotes, they have developed a series of complex defensive behaviors. A hognose's initial response to a threat will be to flatten the skin on its neck and inflate its body, hissing loudly and mock-striking. If that does not prove effective, the snake will convulse and feign death, flipping onto its back and opening its mouth to let its tongue hang out. Its upturned snout is used to burrow in search of the toads that make up much of its diet. Though unlikely to bite and not dangerous to humans, this species possesses a mild toxin and enlarged rear teeth for subduing prey.

