

July 2022 Article – Snakes

Sarah Betts

Executive Director, Seneca Parks

Summer Sun Enjoyed By Many

Much like many humans, snakes also enjoy spending time in the sun. Snakes are cold blooded, so this helps to elevate their body temperature even more quickly than just relying on the ambient air temperature. However, it is this snake basking behavior that most often brings snakes in direct contact with humans.

Normally, snakes stay away from humans. They can feel ground vibrations from human activity, hear noises, and smell with the help of their flicking tongue. So, as they sense things coming closer, they generally move away. However, if they are asleep, they may not move away in time before they are stepped on, mowed over, or run over by a vehicle.

How can you tell if the snake is asleep? They don't have eyelids to close, so this can be a challenge. There are a couple clues to look for, but no guarantees. One, the snake will be completely still. Two, they won't be tongue-flicking. Three, they don't move if a loud noise is made. Four, their breathing will be slower.

I don't know about you, but I am not extremely familiar with snake breathing rates, so, focus on the first three clues.

Actually, at this point, there is a number Five clue that could be added to the list as well. Five, if it is making a rattling or hissing sound – it is NOT asleep and you need to move away immediately!

It is important to know whether the snake is venomous or not. Luckily, in Ohio there are only three venomous snakes: Northern Copperhead, Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake, and Timber Rattlesnake. Even better (if you don't want to see one), only the Eastern Massasauga has been found in Seneca County, and that was prior to 1976. That is not to say that they will never be found here, but it is a low probability.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it is the Northern Copperhead that is responsible for the most snake bites in the U.S. each year. Few of these have been fatal – and yes, most were a result of stepping on a sleeping snake. Still, if you are bitten by a snake, it is recommended to go to the hospital immediately.

So what snakes are most commonly found basking along the trails in the parks? We typically see Garter snakes, Dekay's Brownsnakes, Northern Watersnakes, and Eastern Milksnakes. Will you see a snake every time you walk a trail? No. Seeing snakes is rather rare, since they have many ways to sense if someone is coming.

If you are interested in learning more about these or other Ohio snakes, ODNR has an excellent field guide available on-line at www.Ohiodnr.gov or search "Reptiles of Ohio Field Guide" and of course check out the upcoming park programs at www.SenecaCountyParks.com and enjoy the many beautiful trails in Seneca County.