

Spring is here and you know what that means... Yes, it is time to start thinking about hitting the field and collecting all those awesome rocks again. But before you start rooting around in that rock pile looking for that prize, you should stop and think of the creatures that just might be living in it already. A trip to the field should not include a side trip to a hospital...



There are only two known poisonous spiders in Virginia, but both have bad reputations. The Black Widow is probably the more famous of the two spiders, however this spider is not really aggressive. The female Black Widow is easily identifiable by her shiny black body and distinctive scarlet-red hourglass shape on the underside of her abdomen. Males will have red spots and white markings on their undersides. The spider's name derives from the female's occasional habit of killing and consuming the male after mating. Most bites on humans are the result of an intrusion into the spider's nest, which the spider builds in woodpiles, rotting tree stumps, corners of garages or any small unoccupied, undisturbed hole. The female guards the nest throughout the summer and this is when most bites occur.

A person usually doesn't feel pain until several hours after a bite, then he or she may also experience nausea, fever, burning in the skin, aching abdomen, and possibly difficulty breathing. While symptoms generally dissipate in healthy adults within four days, the venom of the black widow can be lethal to very young children and the elderly.

While the brown recluse has been reported in Virginia, sightings are extremely rare and, so far, confined to the western regions of the state. The brown recluse is light to chocolate brown in color, has three pairs of eyes arranged in a triad of three pairs which is one of the main diagnostic features for recluses, and a dark violin-shaped marking that extends behind the head toward the body. They prefer dark, dry, undisturbed crevices, such as under rocks and the loosened bark of dead trees or logs. In a home, a brown recluse will live inside cracks in the walls and in or behind storage boxes. They are incredibly tolerant of one another and can be found in very high numbers within a single location. In fact, "where there is one, there are many" would typically be an accurate rule of thumb! The brown recluse has an outsized reputation because its venom causes necrosis of the skin where the bite occurs.



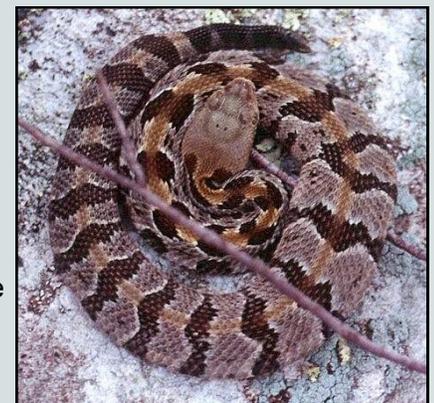
Most bites start out as a blister, which can be accompanied by fever, chills, nausea and in rare cases, convulsions or death. The cells of the affected area die and are shed, in some cases leaving behind a large hole that takes a long time to heal and recover.



There are only three species of venomous snakes in Virginia. The Copperhead is a heavy-bodied, medium-sized venomous snake that grows to a length of 24-36 in. The head is triangular and coppery-red with an hourglass pattern. There are dark, rounded spots on the sides of the belly and the scales are weakly keeled. The upper side of the body and tail are pinkish tan to dark brown, with hourglass-shaped crossbands colored chestnut to dark brown; most dorsal scales are sprinkled with black flecks. Juveniles have the same color patterns as the adults, except that the tip of the tail is a sulfur yellow and juveniles lack the black flecking of the adults. There are regional differences in body color and pattern throughout Virginia.

This snake is found statewide, in a wide variety of terrestrial habitats, including wetlands, forests, fields, and edge areas of all types. The copperhead is found in open areas with higher rock densities, and uses all types of structures for cover, including abandoned buildings, brush piles, and stone walls.

The Timber Rattlesnake grows to lengths of 36-60 in. There are two major color patterns: (1) the yellow phase, in which there are black or dark brown crossbands on a ground color of yellow, brown, or gray; the crossbands, which may be V-shaped, break up anteriorly to form a row of darker spots down the back, plus a row along each side of the body; (Cont'd on Pg 7)



SNAKES, BEES AND SPIDERS.....OH MY! (CONT'D)

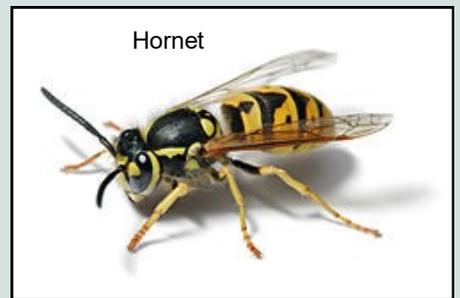
and, (2) the black phase, in which the head is black and there are black blotches and chevrons on a ground color of dark brown to nearly black. This species will emerge from hibernation in April and May. This species occurs at elevations up to 6000 feet, and sometimes higher, in the Blue Ridge, in the far western mountains, and in the western Piedmont. It inhabits upland hardwood and mixed pine-hardwood forests, in areas where there are sunny, rocky slopes and ledges. This snake needs places to hibernate that allow it to stay below the frost line, such as large cracks in rocky outcroppings.



The Canebrake Rattlesnake is a large, venomous snake that grows to lengths of 36-60 in. The canebrake rattlesnake is pinkish to light tan with dark-brown to black blotches and chevrons, and it has a marked stripe down the back and a stripe from the eye to the jaw. The pupil of the eye is vertical and elliptical. The black tail is tipped with a rattle. Males grow larger than females. It is listed as state endangered. This species inhabits hardwood and mixed hardwood-pine forests, cane fields, and the ridges and glades of swampy areas in localized areas of southeastern Virginia. It overwinters in the base of hollow trees or in stumps.

There are many different types of wasps, bees, and hornets in Virginia. They will nest in many different types

of locations to include trees, holes, under rocks, in brush, even old abandoned cars. Bees can only sting once then die; wasps and hornets however can sting multiple times and suffer no effects. If a nest is disturbed they will defend it vigorously, if one is injured away from the nest others nearby may attack to defend the wounded individual as well. Most will go about their business foraging for food and ignore you, some however, such as yellow jackets, are much more aggressive and likely to attack than others. Be observant of the area around you. If you see insects flying to and from a particular place, avoid it!



Fire ant mounds are found in warm, sunny locations such as landscape beds, lawns, around trees and shrubs, along sidewalk cracks and against buildings. If disturbed, these ants are generally aggressive and can inflict painful stings. Fire ants clamp onto their targets with powerful jaws and sting their victims repeatedly. Each sting injects a dose of venom that causes a burning sensation. The stings raise itching blisters that can become infected. In sensitive victims, the stings can cause anaphylactic shock (symptoms include trouble breathing and fainting) or even death. The counties affected by Fire Ants in Virginia are James City and York and cities of Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach and Williamsburg.

Bear sightings are becoming common throughout much of Virginia. Adult black bears are approximately 4 to 7 feet from nose to tail, and two to three feet high at the withers. Males are larger than females. Black bears have small eyes, rounded ears, a long snout, large non retractable claws, a large body, a short tail, and shaggy hair. Depending on the time of year, adult female black bears commonly weigh between 90 to 250 pounds. Males commonly weigh between 130 to 500 pounds. Incredibly adaptable, black bears occupy a greater range of habitats than any bear in the world. Bear home ranges must include food, water, cover, denning sites and diverse habitat types. Although bears are thought to be a mature forest species, they often use a variety of habitat types. What should you do if you see a bear? Enjoy and keep a respectful distance! In most cases, the bear will move on quickly. Normal trail noise should alert bears to your presence and prompt a bear to leave before you ever see it. Bears usually run and hide from people. Never approach the animal, and observe it only from a distance. Make it aware of your presence by clapping, talking, singing or making other sounds. If you encounter a bear at close range, remain standing upright, avoid direct eye contact, back up slowly and speak in a calm, assertive and assuring voice.

