

# Timber Rattlesnakes and the Department of Defense



The Timber Rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*) is a North American pitviper that is widely distributed in forests of the eastern third of the United States. This species has been documented on approximately 40 military installations and has the potential to occur on an additional 50 installations.

**Description:** Adults are typically 30 to 60 inches in total length. The coloration of this species is highly variable. In general it has a series of wavy cross-bands (chevrons), which are often broken into blotches on the anterior portion of the body, and in some regions an orange-rust mid-dorsal stripe. The background color ranges from light tan, brown, gray, yellow, to pinkish. Some individuals are completely black. The tail is usually black. Newborns and juveniles are colored similar to adults and are venomous.

**Range:** Widely distributed across much of the eastern United States and currently occurs in 30 states. Although subspecies of *C. horridus* are no longer recognized, two geographic variants occur (a coastal plain variant and mountain/piedmont variant).



**Habitat:** This species occurs primarily in deciduous or mixed deciduous-coniferous forest habitats or longleaf pine savannahs of mountainous and coastal plain regions. Hibernation sites include rocky slopes and deep crevices, holes associated with root systems of live and dead trees, and the burrows of animals such as gopher tortoises, armadillos, and rodents.

**Behavior:** Generally active from April-October. Males typically have larger home ranges than females and mate search during July and August. These ambush predators prey mostly on small mammals. Individuals of this species may live in excess of 30 years in the wild.

**Conservation Status:** The Timber Rattlesnake is listed as state-endangered or -threatened in 12 of the 30 states it occupies and has been extirpated from Maine, Delaware, Rhode Island, and Ontario, Canada.

**Threats:** Habitat loss (suburban development and strip-mining), road mortality and human persecution (organized snake hunts and incidental killing) are threats to this species. The IUCN lists this species as Least Concern, with a decreasing population trend and NatureServe lists this species as G4- Apparently Secure.

