

SUPER SERPENT: WHY THE RATTLESNAKE IS NATURE'S PERFECT PREDATOR

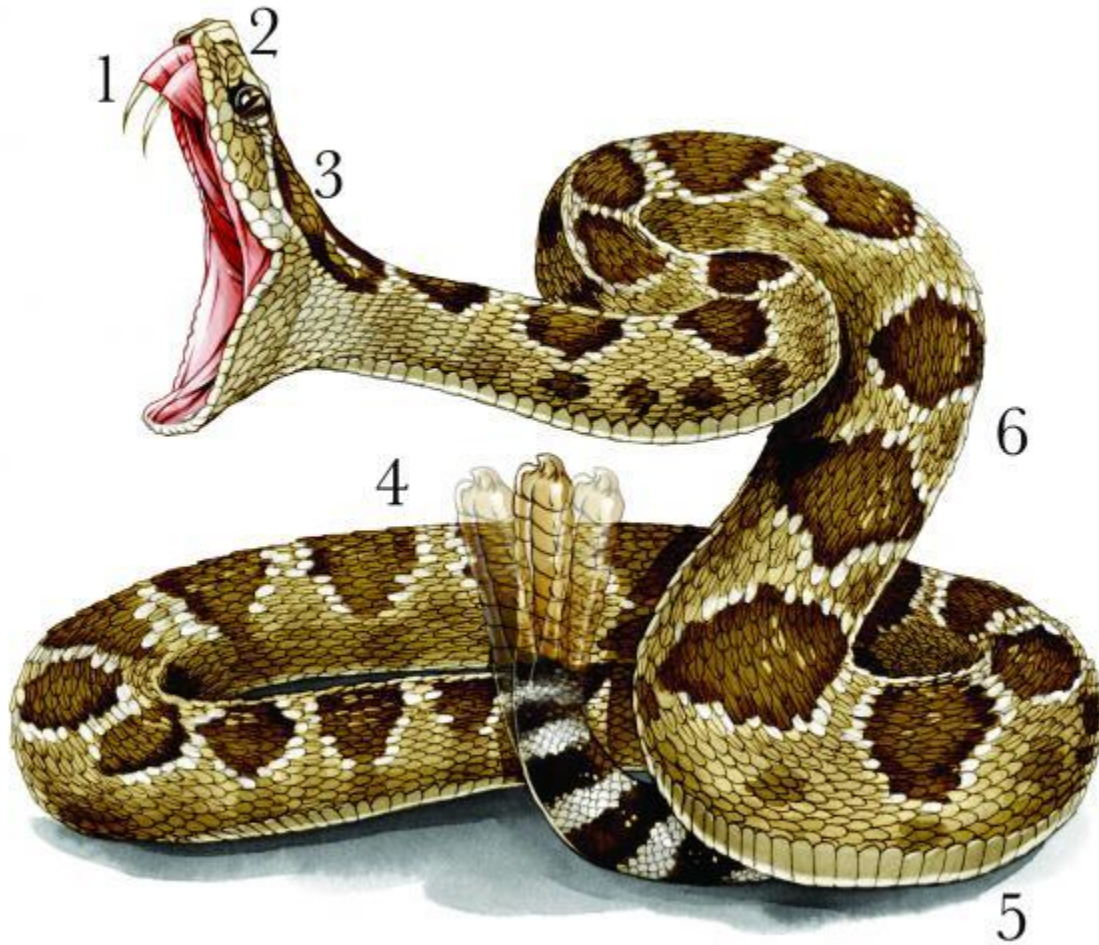


Illustration by: Michael Hoeweler

- 1) **FANGS:** The rattlesnake has hollow retractable fangs that spring erect when it strikes. The fangs of an eastern diamondback rattlesnake, America's largest species, are nearly an inch long.
- 2) **SENSORIES:** The snake senses the heat of its prey through pits on the sides of its head. And the Jacobson's organ acts as the rattler's sense of smell, enabling it to follow prey it has struck.
- 3) **VENOM:** The venom glands store many toxins. The Mojave has the most virulent venom; the eastern and western diamondbacks are dangerous because of the large doses they can inject.
- 4) **RATTLE:** The rattle consists of special scales; a new one added each time the snake sheds its skin. These linked segments vibrate at 50 cycles per second, deterring predators—and smart humans.
- 5) **SCALES:** A pattern of bands, diamonds, and blotches gives the rattlesnake a suit of camouflage that is next to invisible. A rattler typically hunts in dim light, waiting patiently by the trail of its prey.
- 6) **STRIKE:** A rattler can strike at a speed of up to 15 feet per second, and two-thirds the length of its body. After a strike, it immediately releases and recoils so dangerous animals can't attack in return.