The western diamondback often hunts at night. It ambushes victims along trails or attacks them in their burrows. Sometimes they strike and swallow an animal which weighs more than the snake. The western diamondback will coil, rattle fearsomely, and stand its ground when threatened. It bites hundreds of people a year, which is more than any other venomous snake in the United States. Their rattles are used as a defensive warning sign - "stay away". Rattles are a series of interlocking segments that bounce against each other to emit the rattling sound. They are hollow and made of keratin just like fingernails. In the autumn, these rattlesnakes head for the community den (hibernacula) - in a cave or rocky recess - where they hibernate over the winter. The western diamondback eats small mammals such as chipmunks, prairie dogs, gophers, ground squirrels, rabbits, mice and rats. The snake will also eat birds within reach.

**Breeding Season**

The rattlesnake reaches sexual maturity at 3 years. Mating occurs in the spring following emergence from hibernation. The gestation period lasts for 167 days. The birthing process may last for 3 to 5 hours and produce 10 to 20 young. The young are born complete with fangs and venom, armed and dangerous at birth.

**Tips on Snake Bites**

*Bring in the dead snake only if this can be done safely. Do not waste time hunting for the snake, and do not risk another bite if it is not easy to kill the snake. Be careful of the head when transporting it - a snake can actually bite for up to an hour after it's dead.*

*Restrict movement.* Immobilize the site of the bite and keep it below heart level to reduce the flow of venom.

*Do not apply a tourniquet.* Do not apply ice or cold compresses to a snake bite. Do not try to suck out the venom by mouth.

*Keep your dogs on a leash!* When out on a walk, keep your pets leashed to greatly reduce the chance of a negative wildlife encounter.