

Timber Rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*)

Reptile Species of Concern

State Rank: S3S4 (vulnerable/apparently secure), Global Rank: G4 (apparently secure)

Identification

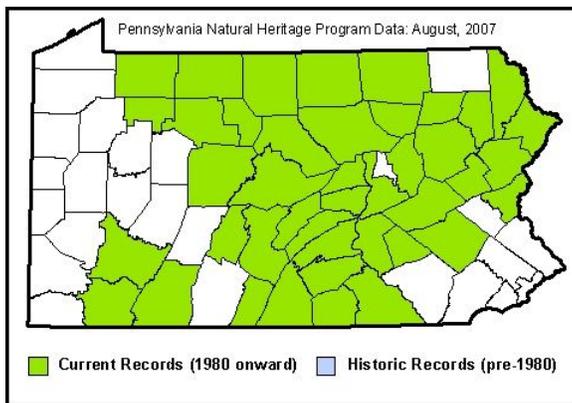
Timber rattlesnakes (*Crotalus horridus*) are easily distinguished from other snakes in Pennsylvania. Timber rattlesnakes are stout-bodied, large snakes reaching lengths of up to 5 feet. Color is extremely variable but usually consists of brown or black bands on bright yellow to black coloration. The head is triangular in shape and a rattle is present at the end of the black tail. This species may be confused with the less common eastern massasauga (*Sistrurus catenatus catenatus*) only present in the western portion of the state. The timber rattlesnake can be distinguished from the massasauga by the lack of white facial lines, the black tail forward of the rattle, and numerous small head-scales.



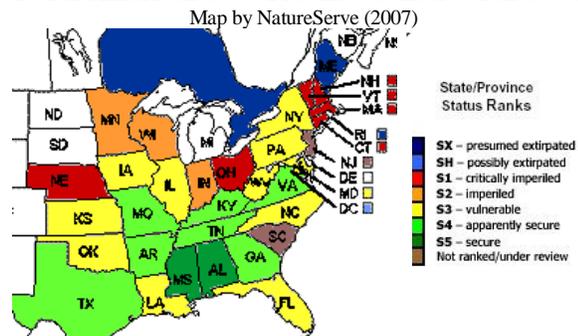
Photo: PA Science Office

Habitat

Crotalus horridus is associated with deciduous forests and rocky outcrops. Hibernacula are usually found on south-facing rocky slopes with adequate crevices to provide shelter during the winter months. Males may travel far from the den site in the summer, moving into valleys and low-lying areas. Gravid females are far less mobile and tend to stay within a short distance of the den. Timber rattlesnakes are venomous, however are generally mild-mannered and not likely to strike.



North American State/Province Conservation Status



Conservation/Status

Timber rattlesnake numbers have decreased significantly from historic records. This species was once widespread across the state. The remaining populations are usually found in remote, isolated areas. Collection and destruction of habitat are likely the main reasons for reductions in population size. Den sites have been targets for collection and should be the focus of conservation efforts for this species. The state status of the timber rattlesnake is candidate at risk (CA). Though this species is still relatively abundant across the state, it remains vulnerable to exploitation. Permits are now required to collect rattlesnakes and only one snake can be taken each year. Snake hunts still occur in the state but after capture, snakes must be marked and release and the site of capture. Biologists are gathering information from collectors and individual studies to determine the current status of this species in the state.

References

- Genoway, H.H. and F.J. Brenner. 1985. Species of Special Concern in Pennsylvania. Carnegie Museum of Natural History. Pittsburgh, PA. 430pp.
- Hulse, A.C., C.J. McCoy, and E.J. Censky. 2001. Amphibians and Reptiles of Pennsylvania and the Northeast. Cornell University Press, New York. 419pp.
- The Center for Reptile and Amphibian Conservation and Management. Species Accounts: Timber Rattlesnake. Website: http://herpcenter.ipfw.edu/outreach/accounts/reptiles/snakes/Timber_Rattlesnake/
- NatureServe. 2007. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 6.2. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>. (Accessed: September 4, 2007).

