

Cottonmouth

(Water Moccasin)

(*Agkistrodon piscivorous*)



Cottonmouth Photo © Terry Hibbitts

Identification:

Length: 20 - 30 inches.

Coloration: Adult Cottonmouths are usually dull in color (dark gray-brown or even black). If any pattern exists, it is usually a poorly defined lateral banding.

Other distinguishing features: Vertically elliptical pupils (like a cat's eyes), heat-sensing pits between the eyes and nostrils (characteristic of all pit vipers).

NOTE: Many times harmless water snakes are misidentified as Cottonmouths. Behavioral clues are often the best way to determine the Cottonmouth from other harmless water snakes. If confronted, the Cottonmouth will stand its ground and "gape" (open its mouth), revealing the cotton white mouth. Other water snakes quickly retreat. While swimming, the cottonmouth's entire body floats and the head is held out of the water. As other water snakes swim, the body does not float and the head barely breaks the water's surface.

Habitat:

Cottonmouths are generally found in or near lakes, rivers, ponds and swamps. Though this species is not common in and around Arlington.

Benefits:

This species feeds on frogs, fish and other small vertebrates within its habitat.

Problems / Concerns:

This species is venomous. However, only a small percentage (7%) of snakebites in Texas each year involves this species. Also, according to the National Safety Council, a person is 5 times more likely to be killed by lightning (odds are 1 in 4,210,857 per year) than by snakebite (odds are less than 1 in 20,406,462).

City Management Policy:

The city's management policy for this species may range from "no action" to relocating individuals to the closest suitable habitat.

Citizen's Responsibility:

To coexist peacefully with these animals, citizens are encouraged to stay on designated trails and remain alert.

Similar Species:

Diamondback Water Snake
(*Nerodia rhombifer*)

Blotched Water Snake
(*Nerodia erythrogaster*)



Diamondback Water Snake
Photo © Terry Hibbitts



Blotched Water Snake
Photo © Terry Hibbitts