

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

Midpen helps plants, animals and people thrive throughout the greater Santa Cruz Mountains region by preserving a connected greenbelt of more than 70,000 acres of public open space. These diverse and scenic landscapes, from bay wetlands to redwood forests and coastal grasslands, hosts an incredible diversity of life, helping make our region one of the world's biodiversity hotspots.

In Case of Emergency

If you experience an emergency on Midpen lands (fire, accident, or other immediate threat to life or property), call 911.

Contact Us

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California Kingsnake photo: Amanda Mills

Mountain Kingsnake, Rubber Boa,
Racer Sharp-tailed Snake photos: ©Gary Nafis

Pacific Ring-Necked Snake photo: Karen Werner

Garter Snakes photo: Brian Hubb



Rattlesnake Safety

What's that rattling noise? Nope, it's not a maraca, it's the Northern Pacific rattlesnake. As the Bay Area's only venomous snake, make sure to respect this predator's space.

How to recognize a rattlesnake:

Northern Pacific rattlesnakes are typically 15-36 inches in length, boasting brown or grey coloring with darker splotches referred to as "saddles." They can be identified by the rattle located on their tails, their diamond-shaped heads and stocky build. The harmless look-alike gopher snake is much slimmer, doesn't have a rattle, and can get much longer than rattlesnakes. When threatened, gopher snakes may imitate rattlesnakes by flattening their heads and shaking their tails.

Rattlesnakes often give an audible rattle warning. If you happen to encounter a rattlesnake on an outdoor excursion, don't panic.

To minimize the risk of a bite:

- Watch your step
- Stay on the trail
- Wear hiking boots
- Avoid tall grass
- Look before placing your hands
- Keep an eye on children and pets
- Remain attentive
- Give rattlesnakes the right of way
- Do not touch a snake that appears to be dead

As long as you respect a rattlesnake's space, there is nothing to fear.

**Scan to learn more
about rattlesnakes**



If you are bitten by a rattlesnake:

DO:

- Stay calm and call 911 as soon as possible. First responders will coordinate getting you to the nearest hospital with antivenom
- Follow 911's instructions, including:
 - Move away from the snake to avoid further bites
 - Stay calm
 - Remove any watches, rings or tight-fitting clothing that may constrict during swelling
 - Take note of the time of bite and, if possible, draw a circle around the extent of swelling
- If your pet is bitten, many veterinarians carry rattlesnake anti-venom and vaccines. Contact your veterinarian for more information

DON'T:

- Apply a tourniquet
- Touch the wound in any way not recommended by 911, including:
 - Attempt to suck out the venom by mouth
 - Cut into the wound
 - Pack the wound
- Take any medication not recommended by 911
- Attempt to kill, capture or transport the snake



Photo: Strether Smith

FACT: One amazing adaptation of rattlesnakes is their heat-sensing pit organs. Located between the eye and nostril, the pit organ allows for thermoregulation and potentially improves their ability to sense the heat of their warm-blooded prey.



Snakes in Open Space



Snakes in Open Space

When enjoying Midpen preserves in the warmer months, keep an eye out for snakes. Sometimes that slow moving stick isn't a stick after all. Many species of snake call Midpen lands home. From the mesmerizing black-and-white-banded California kingsnake to the electric blues and bright oranges of the endangered San Francisco garter snake, Midpen actively works to maintain and restore native habitats for our fork-tongued friends.

Snakes are ectothermic (cold-blooded) meaning they can't internally regulate their body temperature and are reliant on external heat sources. Because of this, snakes are most likely to be observed between spring and fall, while they are soaking up the sun. They can be observed in, under, or on top of logs, rocks and other debris. They can also be seen splaying out across trails, warming themselves on paved areas or even slithering in trees.

Snakes are a key part of the ecosystem, acting as a natural population control for rodents. They are also a necessary food source for raptors, coyotes and even each other.

Photo: Paulina Wrzeszcz

Snake Species That Call Midpen Home



Pacific Gopher Snake (*Pituophis catenifer*)

The gopher snake has a tan body with darker brown splotches, and ranges from three to seven feet in length. Often mistaken for a rattlesnake, gopher snakes are more slender, and have a more streamlined head, unlike the diamond-shaped head and stocky build of a rattlesnake.



California Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis californiae*)

The black and white banded California kingsnake typically ranges from two and a half to three and a half feet in length. This snake has a natural resistance to venom and powerful constricting force, allowing it to prey on rattlesnakes. This ability has earned it the title of king.



California Mountain Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis zonata*)

The black, white and red banded mountain king snake typically ranges from 20-40 inches and although not related to the California kingsnake, it also has the necessary abilities to prey on rattlesnakes.



Pacific Ring-Necked Snake (*Diadophis punctatus amabilis*)

Is that snake wearing a necklace? The Pacific ring-necked sports a bright red/orange band that extends down their underside and typically ranges from 11-16 inches. When threatened, this snake wraps itself into a coil with its bright belly up as a warning to potential predators. While not poisonous itself, bright colors in nature often serve as a warning of toxicity.



Rubber Boa (*Charina bottae*)

One of the two boas in California, the rubber boa gets its name from its brownish rubber-like skin and typically ranges from 18-26 inches in length. Sometimes referred to as the two-headed snake, their blunt tail resembles a smaller head to confuse predators.

Background photo: Frances Freyberg



Garter Snakes (*Thamnophis*)

Various garter snake species call Midpen preserves home, including the endangered San Francisco garter snake. Flaunting vibrant blue and orange stripes, it is easy to see why the San Francisco garter snake is considered one of North America's most beautiful snakes. Midpen is actively working to protect San Francisco garter snakes and their dwindling habitats.



Racers (*Coluber constrictor*)

Two species of racers reside in Midpen lands and are typically around one foot in length. They are slender, fast-moving snakes with a large head and eyes and a long thin tail. Shown is the yellow-bellied racer.



Sharp-tailed Snake (*Contia tenuis*)

Sharp-tailed snakes are typically around eight inches in length, featuring a reddish-gray appearance, a thin body, and a flattened head.



Photo: Charles Castrovinci

Come visit Rolo at the David C. Daniels Nature Center located in our Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve! Rolo can't be reintroduced into the wild and now serves as a Midpen ambassador to help educate the public on local wildlife. The Nature Center is open on weekends from spring to fall.

Scan to learn more about snakes



Rattlesnake safety on the other side

