

Cherokee Ethnobiology

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WESTERN COTTONMOUTH

Cherokee Importance

Unfortunately, today most snakes are wantonly killed on sight. However, snakes (especially venomous snakes) played a revered role in Cherokee culture and lore, thus, they would never be harmed. The alternative name “water moccasin” derives from its ability to seemingly “float” atop the water surface.

Description

The cottonmouth is a relatively short poisonous snake with a stocky body. The cottonmouth will only reach lengths of up to 42 inches long. Younger snakes will show a distinct body pattern, whereas this pattern begins to fade as the snake gets older. Cottonmouths are quite quick to show their cottony-looking mouth (hence the name) if bothered. Their fangs, shown above, are like tiny hypodermic needles. Not every bite from a cottonmouth will deliver poison, as they are capable of delivering a “dry” bite. This is done when they just want the threat away from them. Their poison is reserved for their prey, which consists of fish, frogs, snakes, lizards, mammals and birds. Most snakes seen near water are just assumed it is a cottonmouth, but in fact, most snakes seen near water are watersnakes, which are nonpoisonous.

Where found:	Usually found near permanent water sources with plenty of cover.
Other Name:	Water Moccasin
Taxonomy:	Kingdom - Animalia Phylum - Chordata Class - Reptilia Order - Squamata Family - Viperidae Genus — <i>Agkistrodon</i> Species — <i>piscivorus</i>

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