

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Rattlesnakes

By Guy Belleranti

You're taking a springtime family hike on a trail. Suddenly you hear it- a distinctive rattling noise. Freeze! Look around closely. There! Rattlesnake beside a bush just ahead!

The snake knows you're too big to eat and is rattling a warning that you're in its territory. Get too close and it might defend itself by biting and injecting venom from fangs connected to venom glands. So back up slowly and go another way.

Rattlesnakes are North and South American reptiles. They live in deserts, mountains, prairies, forests, and swamps. The most species live in the southwestern United States and in

north

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First, they smell nearby prey by catching odor particles on their forked tongue. This tongue carries the particles to a special organ in the roof of the snake's mouth called the Jacobson's organ.

Second, their body muscles pick up the vibrations of moving prey. The muscles send the sound through the snake's jawbones to its inner ears. (The rattlesnake does not have outer ear openings.)

Third, while a rattlesnake can see with its eyes, even more impressive is its "heat vision". A rattlesnake has heat-



sensing pits behind its nostrils. With these pits the rattlesnake can detect a warm-blooded animal's body heat and know the size of the animal even on the darkest night.



Unlike most reptiles, baby rattlesnakes do not hatch from eggs that are laid on the ground. Rattlesnake eggs hatch inside the mother and the babies are born alive. They're born with teeth, fangs, and v

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## About the Author

Guy Belleranti works as a docent at Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences working with wild animals and teaching others.

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1. Why does a rattlesnake make a rattling sound?
- a. to warn animals that it is feeling threatened
  - b. to help it find food in the desert
  - c. to find other members of its family
  - d. to attract raptors and king snakes

2. According to the author of this article, what should you do if you see a rattlesnake in the desert?

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3. Can a rattlesnake use its "heat vision" to find a lizard wandering through the desert at night? Explain.

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4. Baby rattlesnakes...



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- 5.
- b. see prey that is far away
  - c. move its tongue
  - d. smell prey that is nearby

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

v i c t t i n d i e s

**hint:** unique; easy to identify

2. \_\_\_\_\_

o r i t y t r e r

**hint:** area claimed and protected by an animal

3. \_\_\_\_\_

v e c t r i d t u s e

**hint:** capable of destroying things

4. \_\_\_\_\_



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5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

n g f a s

**hint:** long, pointed teeth

7. \_\_\_\_\_

o v m e n

**hint:** poisonous chemical in some animals

# ANSWER KEY

## Rattlesnakes

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1. Why does a rattlesnake make a rattling sound? **a**
- a. **to warn animals that it is feeling threatened**
  - b. to help it find food in the desert
  - c. to find other members of its family
  - d. to attract raptors and king snakes

2. According to the author of this article, what should you do if you see a rattlesnake in the desert?

**Back up slowly and go the other way.**

3. Can a rattlesnake use its "heat vision" to find a lizard wandering through the desert at night? Explain.

4.



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5. The Jacobson's organ helps a rattlesnake... **d**
- a. make a rattling sound
  - b. see prey that is far away
  - c. move its tongue
  - d. **smell prey that is nearby**

# ANSWER KEY

## Rattlesnakes

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. distinctive

v i c t t i n d i e s

**hint:** unique; easy to identify

2. territory

o r i t y t r e r

**hint:** area claimed and protected by an animal

3. c



# ~ PREVIEW ~

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4. s

5. hatch

h h t c a

**hint:** to come out of an egg

6. fangs

n g f a s

**hint:** long, pointed teeth

7. venom

o v m e n

**hint:** poisonous chemical in some animals