**Snakes on the Move**

The warmer wetter weather we were having had snakes on the move. It is the time of year for snakes to become active. I realize the chance of injury from a snake bite is far less likely than the chance of a heart attack caused by walking up on a snake. And even though I can attribute the sudden sight of a snake to some of my most incredible acrobatic moves, I have still never been much of a snake fan. I know that snakes are necessary and valuable, so I have learned to live with them by doing my best to avoid them.

In Texas, we have 15 snakes that are venomous; they include the pit vipers and coral snakes. Pit vipers include copperheads, cotton mouth (water moccasins), and 9 types of rattlesnakes. Yes, regardless of what your uncle Ernest may have told you, the cottonmouth and water moccasin are the same. Coral snakes are in the Elapidae family, the same as cobras, water snakes, and black mambas. They are the most venomous snake in North America and their venom contains powerful neurotoxins. Fortunately, they are not aggressive, and their small, fixed fangs and small mouth mean that it is difficult for them to puncture human skin. There are many harmless snakes that look similar to the coral snake, always remember *Red and yellow, can kill a fellow; Red and black, friend of Jack;* to be safe, just stay away from all snakes.

The majority of snakes you will see are non-venomous and serve a valuable purpose. Besides producing gravity defying instantaneous flight in humans, snakes primarily prey on rodents. One research project I looked at showed that one Bull Snake will eat up to 1000 field mice in a year. I have also always heard that Bull Snakes eat rattlesnakes and according to the Texas A&M Herpetologist, snakes may occasionally prey on other snakes, but this is not their normal diet. Still, snakes do an excellent job of preying on and keeping rodent populations in check.

Most calls I get on snakes are when they are found in yards, or they get into someone’s house or barns. There are no toxicants or fumigants registered for snake control. There are a few commercial repellents available, but most have been proven to be ineffective. The best course of action is to remove shelter that both snakes and rodents might use. Things like tall grass, brush, or rock piles should be removed from around the home and firewood or lumber stacks should be stored at least 18” off the ground. Controlling rodents will remove snakes’ food source and will discourage them from wanting to come to the area.

In a home or building, exclusion and rodent control is required. Snakes are usually attracted to buildings because of rodents, but they will also seek out the cool damp dark areas in or under buildings. Snakes usually enter buildings at or below ground level. Openings around pipes, electrical outlets, and crawl spaces are typical entry points, but any holes can provide entry. Seal all openings with mortar, hardware cloth, or chalk. If you think you may have a snake in your house using the mice glue traps stapled onto a 16”x24” piece of plywood will work well. Place the board with sticky traps along walls where you think the snake might travel. Then it is up to you to get the stuck snake out of the house. I recommend tying a long piece of cord to the board ahead of time, that way you can drag it over to your neighbor’s yard.

If unlike me, you like and are interested in snakes Texas Parks and Wildlife has lots of useful information. If you are a Texas Herper, you can help Texas Parks and Wildlife track certain species of snakes, other reptiles, and amphibians throughout the state. Look up the Southwestern Center for Herpetological Research on your computer to find out more.

**Cross Timber Land Management Symposium**

As everyone already knows we are facing many challenges. Some areas have received some rainfall, but we are still well behind where we need to be and moving closer to the heat of summer every day. Many factors are out of our hands but there are some management decisions that can help you to at least slow the bleeding. We will be having an excellent program to provide you with some tools and ideas to make those decisions. The Cross Timbers Land Management Symposium will be held Friday, April 28th from 9:00 until 2:00 at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research Station in Stephenville.

We have some excellent specialists talking about good topics for the season. Dr. Bill Fox, Texas A&M Range Specialist, will be talking about range management. James Jackson, former Texas A&M Range Specialist now with Alligare, will be talking about brush and broadleaf weed management. John Tate, from Turner Seed will be discussing Reseeding. Hunter Hamilton with NRCS will be discussing Wildlife Habitat Updates and NRCS Programs. The Erath County Appraisal District will be on-hand to talk about Ag Exemption Laws and finally, Payton Morris DAR Agent will be discussing Emergency Management on your farm or ranch. All these specialists are excellent and extremely knowledgably in their respective fields.

There will be 2 CEU’s, 1 IPM and 1 general available for pesticide license holders. There will be a $20.00 charge and lunch will be provided. If you have questions or would like to pre-register, call the office: 325-356-2539.