

## Coral Snake Hits the News

By now you have probably either read about it in the Birmingham News, or seen it on Channel 6 News - an Eastern Coral Snake has been found in Coosa County. What makes this find so remarkable is not the fact that the Coral Snake can be so deadly, but that it is so rare to find it in this area. In fact it is very uncommon to be found anywhere in Alabama, but most of the sightings have been in South Alabama in the Black Belt Area and further south.

Now before anyone gets into a panic about this highly venomous snake, let's take a look at a few of the facts. This snake is indeed a relative of the cobra and as such demands a certain amount of respect. However, it is a very non-aggressive snake and would just assume mind it's business of catching small rodents, lizards and other small creatures for a meal than try to attack a human which not on its meal menu. Also it does not spit venom as some cobras are known to do. The venom is considered a neurotoxin which affects the nervous system and is what makes this snake unique from the other venomous snakes found in Alabama known as the pit vipers. This group includes the Water Moccasin (Cottonmouth), the Copperhead, and three rattlesnakes (Pigmy Rattlesnake, Timber Rattlesnake, and the Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake).

The Coral Snake is a beautiful snake with bright bands of red, yellow and black. The Coral Snake is very similar in appearance to a mimic non-venomous snake called the Scarlet Kingsnake, which is of no danger at all and is actually a beneficial snake to have around, since it sometimes attacks and kills "poisonous" snakes. The old saying "red touches yellow will kill a fellow, and red touches black is a friend of Jack" has been used to separate this two very similar snakes. This describes the arrangement of the color bands. Red bands adjacent to the yellow bands are the distinguishing marks of a Coral Snake.

Another fact about the snake that makes it a less likely to be observed is that it is mostly nocturnal or active at night. It also spends a great deal of its time underground or under large rocks or other cover. Most daytime sightings have been early in the morning before the snake has returned to its daytime hiding place.

It has been at least 40 years since the last suspected sighting of a Coral Snake in Coosa County. In fact, only three counties (Coosa, Talladega, and Bibb) above the coastal plains (above the fall line) have had any sightings on record. The snake found in Coosa County was in a remote area of the Coosa Wildlife Management Area. It was found by two biologists who were visiting a site known to harbor another rare animal called the Red Cockaded Woodpecker. This tract of land was recently purchased by the State Forever Wild Program and so this home for these rare and unusual animals will remain managed and preserved for years to come.