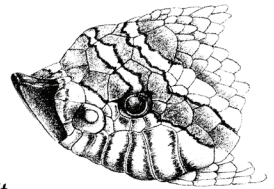


Why Throw a Hissy Fit?



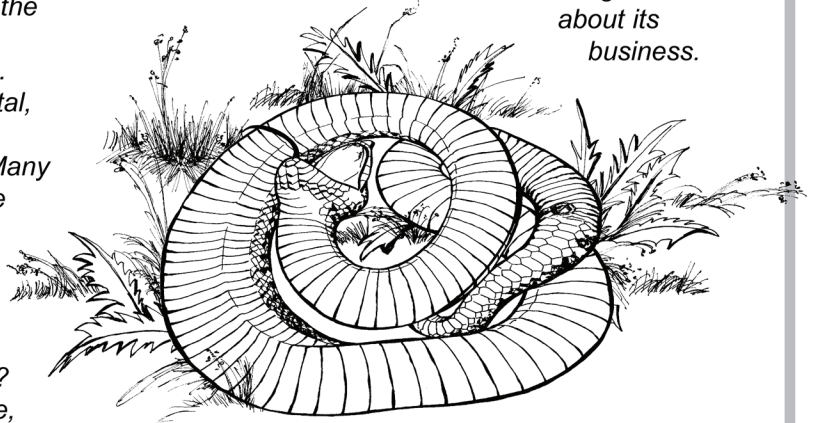
Nothing tends to stir up fear like a snake. Are snakes really the vicious and dangerous reptiles we make them out to be? Most snakes are harmless, and are really quite “charming” once you get to know a little about them.

Colorado has 28 species of snakes. Only three species are venomous—the prairie rattlesnake, the midget faded rattlesnake, and the massasauga. Venomous snakes inject venom with their fangs. Although their venom is toxic and sometimes fatal, these snakes are not “poisonous.” A poisonous animal makes you sick if you touch it or eat it. Many people eat rattlesnake meat, so rattlesnakes are definitely not poisonous!

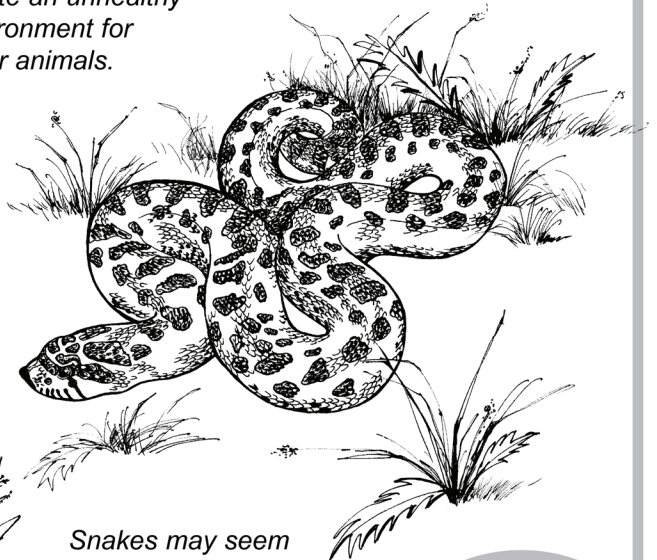
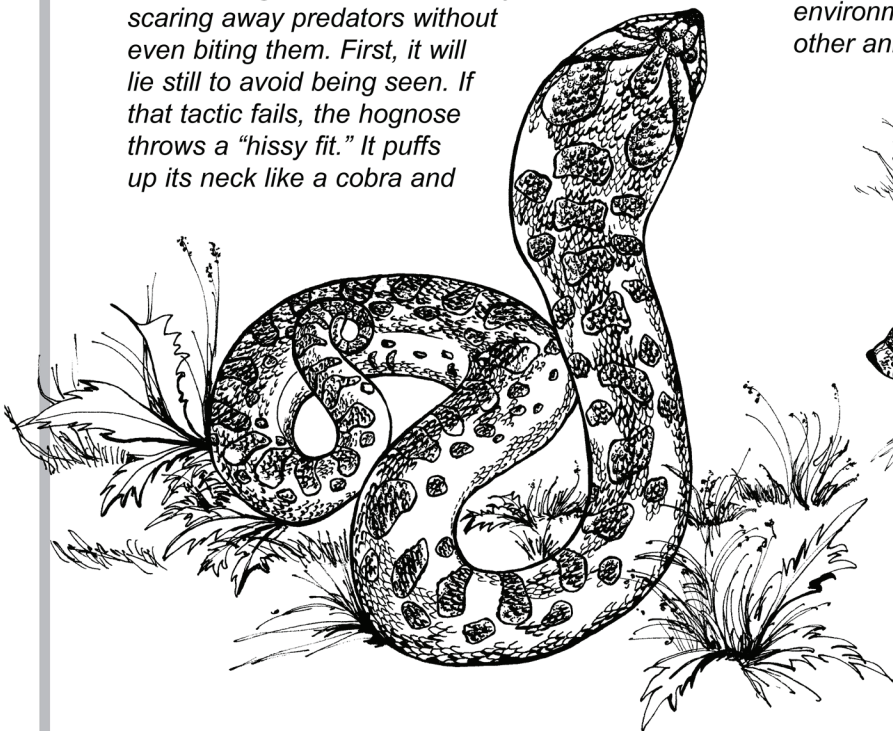
Most venomous snakes use their venom to protect themselves from predators or to catch their prey. How can you tell the difference between venomous and non-venomous snakes? The prairie rattlesnake, midget faded rattlesnake, and massasauga all have rattles at the end of their tails. They also have arrow-shaped heads and thick bodies. It’s not always easy to see these features, so it is best not to bother any snake.

When a snake isn’t venomous, how does it defend itself? It pretends to be venomous! The western hognose snake has ways of scaring away predators without even biting them. First, it will lie still to avoid being seen. If that tactic fails, the hognose throws a “hissy fit.” It puffs up its neck like a cobra and

hisses very loudly. If this doesn’t scare the threat away, the snake pretends to die. The hognose snake lays there as if dead, emits a foul odor, and stays limp even if it’s picked up. Usually, predators don’t want to eat a rotting carcass. After the threat is gone, the snake slithers off and goes about its business.



Every snake needs your respect. Snakes are an important part of the ecosystem. Without predators like snakes, the land would be overrun with the mice and small rodents that they eat. An excess of rodents would destroy vegetation and create an unhealthy environment for other animals.



Snakes may seem a little scary, but without them the world would truly be a frightful place.

