

*** Pigmy Rattlesnake ***

Sistrurus miliarius

Pigmy rattlesnakes, as their name suggests, are miniature rattlesnakes. Sometimes called “groundrattlers,” these snakes are so well camouflaged that they are rarely seen. Adult snakes are usually only 18 inches long or smaller. When coiled on the forest floor, they are only the size of a loblolly pinecone. These snakes have a small delicate rattle that is not much wider than the tip of the tail. When they vibrate this rattle, it sounds very much like an insect buzzing; some people have difficulty hearing the rattle.

Although they are small, “pigmys” are feisty and are apt to strike if molested. Fortunately, these snakes have small venom glands and don’t inject large quantities of their potent venom when they bite. There are no records of any person dying from the bite of a pigmy rattlesnake. Pigmy venom however, is very effective for killing the small frogs, lizards, small mammals and insects they prey upon.

Pigmys probably mate both in the spring and autumn. They give birth to 3-9 babies in late summer. The newborn snakes are so tiny that they could easily coil up on the face of a half dollar.

Pigmy rattlesnakes live in longleaf pine-scrub oak habitats. They share these habitats with reptiles like southern hognose snakes, coachwhip snakes, fence lizards, five-lined skinks and many others. Since these sandhills are home to such a diversity of fauna and flora, they are an essential part of our southeastern ecosystem.



This information is provided by Savannah River Ecology Laboratory Outreach and SPARC.

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Photos by David Scott