



How to identify black snakes

Do NOT judge just by body shape or color !

Thick bodied: the two most common snakes have bodies that look remarkably similar and are about the same size. Look at the lower jaw and the eyes. Don't judge by what might appear to be a triangular shaped head.

Thin bodied: the two most common snakes have bodies that look remarkably similar, too. Look at the chin, and if possible, at the underside.

Snakes in each box are listed from the most commonly seen to the least commonly seen.

Thick bodies

BANDED WATER SNAKE (*commonly seen*)

body thick, fat, heavy (you pick the adjective); when threatened, it can flatten even more to mimic the Water Moccasin

Lower jaw white with many thin, dark, vertical lines

Eye pupil is round

WATER MOCCASIN (*occasionally seen, mostly in spring and summer*)

Body..... thick, fat, heavy (you pick the adjective)

Lower jaw..... light with very wide dark vertical bands

Eye..... pupil is a vertical slit (like a cat); wide, dark, very noticeable dark band through the eye

Thin bodies

BLACK RACER (*commonly seen*)

Body..... thin; underside whitish with occasional spots; matte except when wet; length to 6 feet

Lower jaw..... solid whitish color

Head..... nose slightly lighter than top of head; no noticeable jaw separating head from body

BLACK SWAMP SNAKE (*rarely seen, and only in water*)

Body..... thin; underside bright red; shiny; length only to 18 inches maximum

Lower jaw..... solid dark reddish-black

Head..... nose as dark as top of head; no noticeable jaw separating head from body

RINGNECK SNAKE (*rarely seen*)

Body..... very thin; solid color on top except small yellow to red band around neck; yellow to red on underside; length to 18 inches, but usually 6-12 inches

Head..... no noticeable jaw separating head from body, except for the ring around the neck

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thick bodies: Banded Water Snake p. 28, Water Moccasin p. 19

thin bodies: Black Racer p. 39; Black Swamp Snake p. 31; Ringneck Snake p. 38