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Photo by Tom Murray

HOW MANY?

There are more than 2,700 species of snakes in the world. They live almost everywhere, in deserts, forests, oceans, streams, and lakes. Snakes live on the ground, in trees, and in water. There are a few areas where snakes do not live. They cannot survive in places where the ground stays frozen all year around, such as in the high mountainous regions, or above the Arctic Circle and Antarctica. Some islands, including Ireland and New Zealand, do not have snakes at all.

snakes

O F M A I N E

Maine is home to nine different species of snakes. There are NO venomous snakes currently living in Maine. The Timber Rattlesnake used to live here, but was extirpated, or eliminated from the state.

Summer time is a great time to look for, and get to know, our native snake species. They can be found sunning themselves in many different habitats, from your lawns and gardens, in and around wood piles and stone walls, to wetlands, to farms, fields and woodlands. As you can see from photographs, snakes are beautiful animals, and benefit humans

by preying on bugs, grubs, rodents and other pests.

If you find a snake, move slowly, watch it carefully, and appreciate the job it does in its habitat. Remember, there are NO snakes in Maine that can hurt you, and even if you can't get over the 'CREEP FACTOR', leave it alone and remember the great job snakes do in our habitats!

For more information about Maine Snakes, you can purchase the *Reptiles and Amphibians of Maine* book, or the Snakes of Maine poster from our online store at www.mefishwildlife.com



Q: What did the snake give to her baby at bedtime?
A: A goodnight HISS!



Q: What kind of shoes do reptiles wear? A: SNAKERS!

SUITS OF ARMOR

Plates and scales cover the bodies of Snakes. Without this protective armor, snakes could not move over rough or hot surfaces like tree bark, rocks or roads. Rough belly scales allow the snake to keep a grip on tree branches and to push off from other surfaces when they need to move.

Scales are layers of cells stacked one on top of the other, and are made up of something called Keratin, which is the same thing that our fingernails are made from. The outer cells are dead and protect the living ones underneath them. A few times every year, a snake will shed a layer of dead skin. The new

cells underneath are then ready to take over as the outer layer.

When a snake is ready to shed, its eyes get cloudy and it is temporarily blinded. Why? Because snakes eyes do not have eyelids (that's why they don't blink) but instead are covered with a clear scale called a spectacle. When a snake is ready to shed its old skin, it will rub up against a rough surface, like a rock or in between logs in a woodpile, to tear the skin and then slide right out. Just like taking off a sock!

Q: What school subject
A: HISS-tory!

BODY OF A SNAKE

In case you were wondering they are sooooo snakes actually do Animals with bones are tebrates – and snakes

A snake's backbone is n vertebrae attached to rib approximately 33 vertebrae have between 100-400 verte ribs attached! That is what ma

and helps them move All those bones, and strong internal organs. The throat of the front one-third of the body long stomach, which, like the to the size of whatever th

Snakes also have two long kidneys and intestines. The snake has a small anal open to poop, you know!) cover called the anal plate, and tail made up of mo

THE 9 SNAKES OF MAINE

1. BROWN
2. RIBBON
3. SMOOTH GREEN
4. NORTHERN WATER
5. MILK
6. NORTHERN BLACK RACER
7. RINGNECK
8. COMMON GARTER
9. REDBELLY

HOW SNAKES MOVE

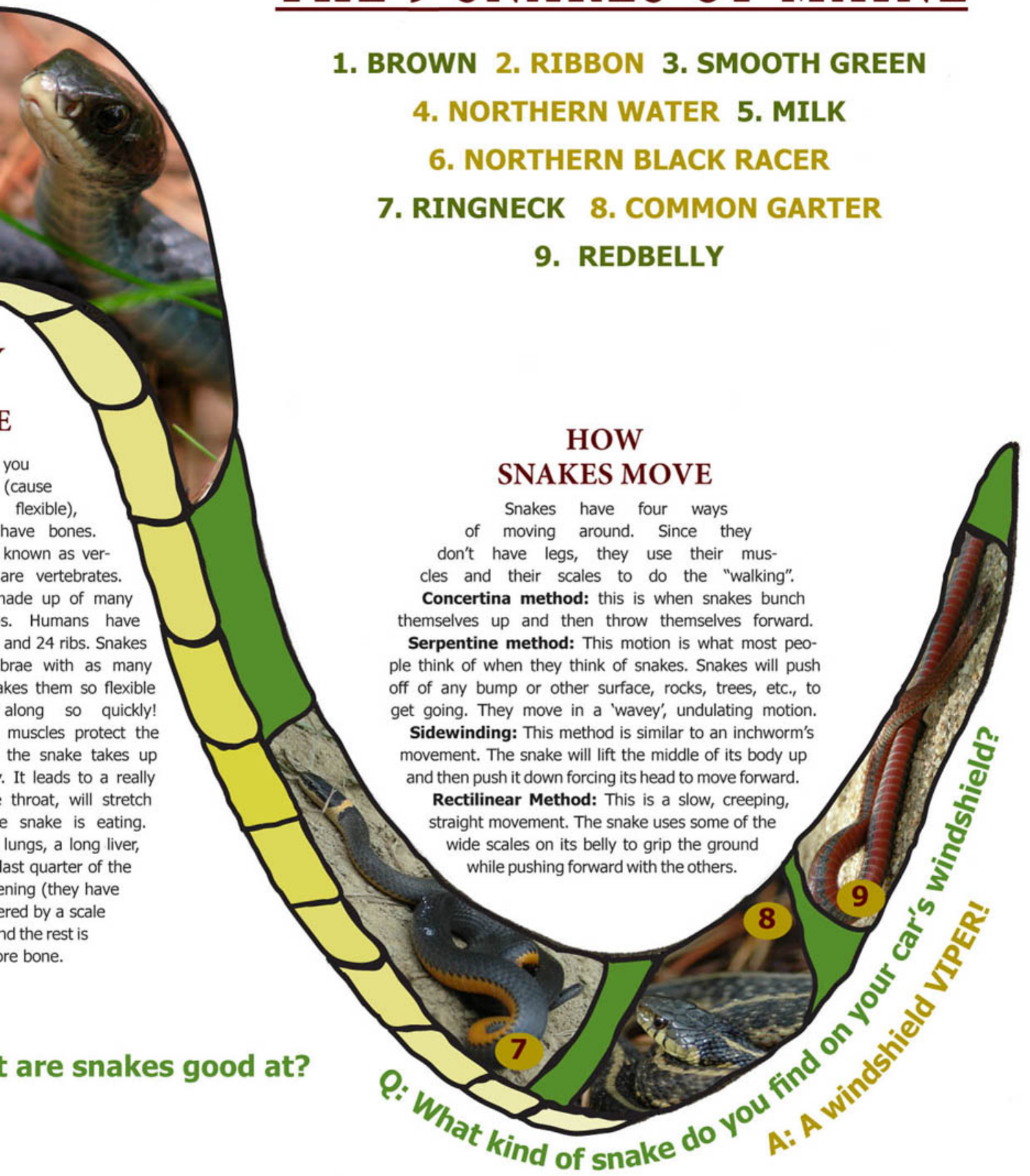
Snakes have four ways of moving around. Since they don't have legs, they use their muscles and their scales to do the "walking".

Concertina method: this is when snakes bunch themselves up and then throw themselves forward.

Serpentine method: This motion is what most people think of when they think of snakes. Snakes will push off of any bump or other surface, rocks, trees, etc., to get going. They move in a 'wavey', undulating motion.

Sidewinding: This method is similar to an inchworm's movement. The snake will lift the middle of its body up and then push it down forcing its head to move forward.

Rectilinear Method: This is a slow, creeping, straight movement. The snake uses some of the wide scales on its belly to grip the ground while pushing forward with the others.



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are snakes good at?

Q: What kind of snake do you find on your car's windshield?
A: A windshield VIPER!



The Eastern Black Racer snake is an endangered species in Maine.

IT MAKES 'SENSE'

Snakes use their senses to hunt, escape danger, and to find a mate. Since snakes have very poor eyesight, their other senses need to make up for it.

Some snakes can smell with their noses, but ALL snakes smell with their tongues. When a snake sticks out its tongue it smells its surroundings. The moist tongue collects scents and small organisms from whatever it touches and from the air around it. When the tongue goes back into the mouth, the forks touch a special sensory spot called the Jacobson's organ, on the roof of the mouth, and tells the snake what it smells. Snakes have a small notch in their lips that they can stick their tongues through so they don't need to open their mouths.

Snakes can absorb vibrations through the ground and determine the size of the prey or danger by its movements.

JAWS!

Snake's jaws are not fused together. That means that unlike our jaws, a snake's jaws are not hooked up at the back of their mouths. This makes it possible for them to eat very big meals, even bigger than their own heads! That would be like you swallowing a whole watermelon!

If you had your mouth full of a watermelon, do you think you could breathe? Not likely! But snakes can. They have a little tube at the bottom of their mouth that

Snakes of Maine

comes out far enough to get air when the rest of their mouth is full.

MMMM-YUMMY!

Snakes are carnivores, meaning they will eat only meat – and that includes each other. Some snakes are hunters, while others will lie in wait to ambush their prey.

All snakes swallow their food whole. While they do have teeth, four rows on the top and two on the bottom, the teeth are made for grabbing, hooking and holding their prey, not chewing. Not all snakes have fangs; only the poisonous ones do (and no poisonous snakes live in Maine!).

Have you ever wondered how a snake can swallow such big meals without chewing? Snakes have powerful muscles all along the front half of their bodies. Snakes use these muscles for moving as well as swallowing. The muscles move the food down along the throat and into the snake's long

stomach. Moving the food through the throat into the stomach can take 10 minutes to an hour, depending on the size of the animal they are eating.

In egg-eating snakes the sharp rib bones will poke through the eggshell to help speed along digestion. Food in the snake's stomach can take anywhere from a few days to a couple of months to break up or digest. That is a long time to work on a meal!

Believe it or not, some snakes only need to eat a couple times a year!

HEY BABY!

Snakes usually mate in spring, right after hibernation ends.

Some snakes, such as boas, rattlesnakes and garter snakes, give birth to live young. That means that the baby snakes develop inside their mother. When they are born they are covered with a thin membrane, kind of like a goopy baggie. The baby uses an egg tooth to rip out of the membrane and wriggle free.

Other snakes lay eggs in a safe, warm place, like in a hollow log or buried in the ground. Snake eggs are not hard like chicken eggs; they are kind of leathery and are torn open by the baby snakes with their egg tooth which they lose soon after hatching. After hatching, the snake babies are on their own.

Snakes will reproduce, or give birth, once a year to every three years.