

## Snakes at the Celery Fields

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The Celery Fields is primarily an aquatic habitat, although there are enough uplands to expect both aquatic and uplands snake species. Aquatic snake species are often mistakenly assumed to be venomous cottonmouth snakes. Common aquatic snakes that may live at the Celery Fields include:

- Florida Green water snake
- Florida (banded) water snake →
- Brown water snake
- Cottonmouth (**Venomous**)

Upland species that may live at the Celery Fields include:

- Southern black racer
- Red rat snake
- Yellow rat snake
- Common garter snake
- Eastern ribbon snake
- Ring-neck snake



Florida is home to 44 different species of snakes. Only 6 of these species are venomous, and only 4 of those venomous species are found in our area. It stands to reason that most of the snakes you will encounter in any setting will be non-venomous species. The four venomous species found in our region include:

- Eastern diamondback rattlesnake
- Dusky pygmy rattlesnake
- Coral snake
- Cottonmouth (aka water moccasin)

By learning to identify these four species, you can feel more confident around all snake species you may spot while hiking, biking or otherwise enjoying the outdoors. All snakes provide valuable environmental services by keeping rodent and reptile/amphibian populations in balance. Snakes are preyed upon by hawks and other birds of prey as well as many mammal species (e.g. coyotes and bobcats). Automobiles are also a major cause of mortality in snakes.

## Celery Fields Aquatic Snake Identification



### Florida Cottonmouth

- Dark mask running from eye to rear of jaw
- Olive brown to black, with or without stripes
- Stout body (3'-5') with abruptly tapering tail
- Flat head much wider than neck
- Protective brow-like scales over eyes
- Swims fully on top of water with head up
- Not aggressive, but holds its ground



### Florida Green Water Snake

- Heavy-bodied snake 4' in length
- Olive or brown body
- May have subtle speckles or wavy bars
- Eyes far forward on a short face
- Swims fully underwater



### Florida Banded Water Snake

- Stout-bodied snake 24" – 42"
- Black, brown or red crossbands on back
- Bands tend to fade with age
- Dark stripe from eye to jaw
- Swims fully underwater



### Brown Water Snake

- Tan/light brown with square brown blotches
- 30" – 55" in length
- Often seen resting in trees at shoreline
- 'Jumps' into water (or boat) when startled
- Swims underwater
- May eat carrion (rare among snakes)

**Fun Fact:** Water snakes don't lay eggs, but instead give birth to live young!



## Celery Fields Uplands Snake Identification



### Southern Black Racer

- Slender satiny black body 36"-60"
- White or gray chin and throat
- Eyes large in proportion to head
- Young snakes look entirely different
- Fast moving, will retreat if possible
- May vibrate their tails when threatened
- Uses head like a periscope when in tall grass



### Red Rat Snake

- Slender body, 4'-6' in length
- Widely varying 'complexion'
- Red, tan, orange w/obvious darker blotches
- Great climbers
- Pretends to be a rattlesnake if threatened
- Common in urban settings
- Great pest control!



### Yellow Rat Snake

- Slender body, 4' – 6' in length
- Widely varying 'complexion'
- Yellow or tan with neck-to-tail brown stripes
- Yellow or orange eyes
- Great climbers and can swim well
- Pretends to be a rattlesnake if threatened
- Great pest control!

**Fun fact:** Cottonmouth snakes (and both types of rattlesnakes) have vertical pupils, like a cat. Non-venomous snakes have round pupils (also venomous coral snakes). This is not a particularly good identification tool, as it means you must be close enough to really see their eyes!



#### **Eastern Garter Snake**

- Greenish body with tan or yellow stripe
- 20" – 28" in length
- Terrestrial but lives near water
- Active during the day
- Bears live young



#### **Bluestripe Ribbon Snake**

- Bluish olive or blue-black w/blue side stripes
- 18" – 25" in length
- Distinct white spot in front of the eye
- Not found outside Florida
- Active during the day
- Semi-aquatic



#### **Ringneck Snake**

- Slender black snake
- Orange or yellow 'necklace'
- Belly matches 'necklace'
- Flashes belly when threatened
- 6" – 10" in length
- Burrower, lives in thatch or mulch
- Lays eggs

**In Conclusion:** This may not be a complete list of all snakes at the Celery Fields. The habitat at the site is rich in food sources for all Florida snakes. When encountering a snake in any environment, stand back and observe. Note the color, size, relationship of head-to-body, behavior and location. There are no snakes that will pursue a human, but all snakes will bite if harassed or threatened. Observing wildlife behaving naturally is a truly enriching experience. We fear what we don't understand. Once you have observed a snake in the wild, look it up, learn about the animal, and you'll replace fear with curiosity.