

Diamonds in the Coastal Plain

By Frederick Boyce

For people such as myself (and I am *not* alone) who have only nice things to say about snakes, there are many words that apply, according to the snake in question. Although snakes might all have the same essentially limbless form, they are certainly not all alike, being in fact an extremely diverse group of animals.

There is no such thing as “just a snake,” as all are special or unique in their own way. Many can be beautiful, especially in regard to color and pattern, and nearly all are fascinating or intriguing, especially the venomous species with their amazing gift of venom—a real super power that enables them to overcome, disable and even dispatch opponents much larger and more threatening than themselves. Some are so agile and fluent in their ability to move, climb or swim with no apparent effort that they seem almost magical. And at least a few, notably our little southern hognose snake with its huge eyes and upturned snout, are arguably “cute.” And while “impressive” is a word that applies to many a snake, especially giant pythons and anacondas, “majestic” is a term that doesn’t normally leap to mind when discussing snakes.

There are, however, at least three or four serpents in the world which do warrant that august title. One would be, of course, the king cobra, longest of all venomous snakes, which builds a nest of leaves and grass with its mate and guards it against all intruders, even elephants. Another would be the bushmaster of Central and

(Continued on page 28)



Amy Oberender, a naturalist in Florida, admires a wild eastern diamondback rattlesnake at what for her is a safe distance—perhaps not quite far enough for people who are not as experienced with snakes. Still, the photo demonstrates that these animals are not aggressive and have no desire to attack humans.

—Photo by Brian Pessotti



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