

COLUBRIDAE

This family covers the remainder of Louisiana snakes not included in the families Viperidae and Elapidae. This is a very diverse group of snakes, comprising 31 species in Louisiana, none of which are venomous. Instead of venom, many of these snakes wrap their body or coils around the prey maintaining their grip until the prey has been suffocated. Corn snakes, speckled king snakes and rat snakes are a few examples of these constrictors found in Louisiana.

Other harmless snakes found in this group eat their prey live, since they have no other means of killing prior to swallowing. These snakes grab the victim with their mouth, hold on to it with their teeth and swallow the animal. A few snakes fitting in this category are the hog-nosed snake, ribbon snake and brown snake.

Since snakes have no arms or hands, and no chewing teeth to cut up their food, they must swallow their prey whole and usually headfirst. This is possible because the snake's flexible jaw apparatus can stretch open very wide (disarticulate). With this feature snakes can swallow animals wider than their own head. A series of muscle contractions then pushes the prey into the snake's stomach. After a meal, snakes are usually inactive and find a safe hiding place while their prey digests. If suddenly captured by a potential predator, snakes with a full stomach will regurgitate or throw up their recent meal to make themselves lighter and quicker to get away from danger.

Many of the snakes in the Colubridae family lay eggs and are called oviparous. One example is the Prairie king snake. Some however produce eggs, but retain them internally until time of hatching. The common garter snake fits this category and is called ovoviparous.