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Wakulla's Snakes Can Be Helpful

The late singer Tiny Tim may have tiptoed through the tulips, but he never walk through the weeds. It is likely because he was afraid of snakes.

It is no coincidence the devil took on the form of a snake in the Book of Genesis. No creature embodies slimy, malevolent evil as much as a snake.

The slanted unblinking eyes, the silent movement, and the consistently flicking forked tongue combine to project the essence of wickedness. It is no wonder Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden of Eden with such friends

Many other cultures have the same perception of snakes. Apep was the Egyptian god of chaos and darkness who was illustrated as a snake, and was the chief nemesis of the sun god Ra. There battles were many and legend.

The Greeks renamed the deity Apophis after Alexander the Great took control of Egypt. Its reputation did not improve.

As a continuation of the 3000 year old tradition, the near-earth potentially hazardous asteroid 99942 was named Apophis. Some astrophysics believe this 1000 foot wide chunk of space rock will collide with Earth in 2029 or 2036 leaving a three mile deep impact crater.

No doubt the headlines will read "A Rock Named After A Snake Did This." Who could blame the public for its dislike of snakes?

Many local discussions of snakes begin with the statement, "The only good snake is a dead snake." Next the tales of deadly snake encounters are relived.

These deliberations may include the recounted meetings with the dreaded two-step snake: if it bites a person, they will drop dead after two steps.

Sometimes the raconteur will have crossed paths with the Cotton-headed Coral Rattler. It is easily identified by its aggressive nature, speedy pursuit of all humans and it has no legs. Less than one person in two hundred is able to escape this demonic predator.



Fortunately for Wakulla County residents the stories have only a grain of truth attached to the tale. A snake may have been seen at the story's origin.

Fossil records indicate snakes have been around since the Cretaceous epoch, or about 140 million years ago. They were likely in Wakulla County long before the first people arrived.



Snakes are natural predators, but humans have never been on the menu in north Florida. Amphibians, insects, small reptiles, rabbits and rodents make up a bulk of their diet.

A Wakulla County without snakes would be a very different and much less inhabitable place. Without snakes controlling the population of rodents, the rats, mice and squirrels would have free range to dine on innumerable components of humanity's infrastructure.

Snakes in 2013 are more visible than in recent years. The consistent and ample rain has allowed prey animals to range wider from water sources, all the time with snakes in pursuit.

Dry years are easier on snakes because prey animals remain closer to the scarce and limited water sources. The snakes do not have to work as hard to have a meal, but in either environment the snakes are doing humanity a favor.

To learn more about snakes in Wakulla County contact the UF/IFAS Wakulla County Extension Office at 850-926-3931 or <http://wakulla.ifas.ufl.edu/>.