

# U.S. Guide to Venomous Snakes and Their Mimics

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U.S. GUIDE TO *VENOMOUS Snakes AND THEIR MIMICS*

**Scott Shupe**

Skyhorse Publishing

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## **PREFACE**

*The goal of this book is to provide all those who enjoy the outdoors with a quick and reliable guide to identifying that small percentage of snakes that pose a real threat to man.*

*With that goal in mind, I have used color photographs in order to give a completely accurate representation of both venomous species and harmless non-venomous species that closely resemble the dangerous snake species.*

*While there are a number of very authoritative books available on the reptiles of the United States, most deal with animals native only to a specific area or state, or else they are so broad in scope that they are cumbersome for the average person trying to quickly and accurately identify a particular snake seen in their backyard or on a recent outdoor experience.*

*In writing this book, I have tried to make it as easy as possible for the average outdoors person (hunter, fisherman, backpacker, gardener, etc.) to quickly and correctly ascertain whether or not the snake in question is, in fact, a dangerous species. I have tried to achieve the goal of identification using the simple method of dividing the entire country into several regions, then providing a set of color photographs of the dangerous snakes of each region, as well as photos of similar harmless species within that region that are often confused with the dangerous species.*

*For the benefit of those with more than just the practical interest in identifying a particular snake, I have in the written text provided detailed information on the natural history of each species and subspecies. Much of this information is borrowed from previously published books and journals, while some of it is of a more personal, anecdotal nature. Wherever my memory served, I have included personal experiences and observations gleaned from some 40 years of hunting, studying, and observing snakes both in the wild and in captivity. In one sense, I guess, this book is for the author an attempt to justify having spent such an inordinate amount of my life in pursuit of a passion that most folks in my tiny western Kentucky hometown would politely refer to as "just a little peculiar."*

*In keeping with my goal of a scientifically accurate text, I have used some technical terminology in describing the physical characteristics, behavior, and natural history of each species and subspecies. For those not familiar with these terms, an alphabetically arranged glossary is provided in the back of this book.*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

*The author wishes to express his appreciation to the following individuals and organizations who have contributed to this book. They are, in no particular order: Jim Harrison—Kentucky Reptile Zoo, Jared Baker—Birmingham Zoo, Steve Reichling—Memphis Zoo, Dale McGinnity—Nashville Zoo, David Baum—U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Carlyle Lake, Illinois, Carlton Burke and Bob Fay—Western North Carolina Nature Center, Joe Mairhauser, Don Middaugh, Tom Lang, and Bill Texel—Reptile Gardens, the late E. Ross Allen, the late Bill Gleason, the late Bill Phelps, and Andrew Koukoulis of the former Ross Allen Reptile Institute, David Drysdale—St. Augustine Alligator Farm, Kenny Maddox—Lake City, Florida, Tom Moxley—Memphis, Tennessee, Bob Myers—American Rattlesnake Museum, Jim Peters—Clermont, Florida, Ed Cassano—Clermont, Florida, Nancy Smith—Jones-Tucson, Arizona, John McGregor—Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources, Dr. Ed Zimmerer—Murray State University, and Patricia and Dick Bartlett—Gainesville, Florida.*

*The following individuals provided the author with additional photographs for the book: Andrew*

*Koukoulis, Dale McGinnity, Nancy Smith-Jones, Ed Cassano, and Dick Bartlett. Black and white drawings provided by Gary Lopiccolo, color drawing by James Dobson.*

*Thanks is also due to historical author Ted Belue and outdoor writers John Phillips and Wade Bourne for their advice and counsel to a first-time author and to Gigi Dawson for her help in preparing the manuscript for final submission.*

*Last, and certainly not least, the author wishes to thank his wife, Lisa, for her sound advice and constant support, and for the enduring patience required to finally convince this author that there really is such a thing as constructive criticism.*

*This book is dedicated to the memory of my father:*

*Kenneth R. "Jap" Shupe*

*A man among men, and the finest example*

*of a human being that I have ever known.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

*The map on page 18 is the key to the expedient use of this book in making a certain identification of a snake seen or encountered in the outdoors. Though the map is loosely based on what naturalists call the geophysical provinces of the United States, the map is an arbitrary creation of the author, and the regional divisions do not necessarily represent the true geophysical regions of the country. I have taken the liberty of creating the regional divisions shown on the map for the purposes of this book only, in an attempt to make it less cumbersome to use. It is important to note that wild animals in general and snakes in particular do not recognize political boundaries or lines drawn on a map. The actual ranges of wild animals are much more closely related to geography than to state boundary lines. Thus, to designate regions using state boundary lines alone would greatly increase the difficulty of using this book for its intended purpose, which is to quickly and accurately determine whether or not a particular snake is a dangerous, venomous species.*

*To help the reader more easily recognize the region of the country where he or she has seen or encountered a snake, the regional divisions are superimposed over a map of the United States showing state boundary lines. With a basic understanding of where the reader is located within a given state, the reader can readily determine in which designated region he or she is located, then refer to the pages of the book showing the photographs of the dangerous snakes found within that region. For instance, the location of my home is in far western Kentucky. Referring to the map, I will see that I am located in the region designated as the Southeast Region. Turning to the page number under the map indicated for that region, I will find a series of photographs depicting the dangerous snakes of that region. Within the photo caption under each venomous snake illustrated are directions to photos of harmless snakes that may be confused with that venomous species. Careful examination of the photographs will hopefully determine the identity of the snake.*

*The captions provided for each photograph also identify the snake, giving both the common name and the scientific name, as well as additional information that will help the reader distinguish the specimen from other similar snakes. In some instances where a great deal of variation exists within a species, more than one photograph of the same species may be used to aid in positive identification. For instance, Timber Rattlesnakes found within the Northeast Region regularly occur in two distinct color phases; in such a case, both color phases would be shown. Please note that even within the same species or subspecies, individual variation does occur. In fact, no two Timber Rattlesnakes will look exactly alike, just as no two horses or for*

*that matter no two people look exactly alike. However, there are always many identifying characters that will distinguish each and every species (or subspecies).*

*Part of the goal of this book will be to point out to the reader those distinguishing features.*

## **PART 1 USE OF THE MAPS**

*The most important feature in this book is the map found at the beginning of Part 2—"Using This Book to Identify a Venomous Snake."*

*This map, found here and on page 18, is titled "Venomous Snake Regions of the United States" and was created by the author solely for this book with the intended purpose of making venomous snake identification easier for those not immediately eliminate all other species not found within the reader's locality, thus disposing of a great deal of confusing information that is not immediately relevant. It should be noted that there still exists the problem of the reader who finds himself located in a place on the map that is on the line of division between two or more regions. In such a case, common sense dictates that the familiar with snakes. The various "venomous snake regions" created for this map are superimposed over a state map of the entire United States. After looking at the map and determining in which venomous snake region the reader is located, the reader can turn to the section of the book containing photographs of the venomous snakes of that region only. In this way it is possible to reader should avail himself of the information provided for both regions.*

## **VENOMOUS SNAKE REGIONS OF THE UNITED STATES**

*The other maps found in Part 3 accompany the written information associated with the various species and subspecies and show the reader where that particular species (or subspecies) is found in the United States. As has been mentioned in the previous paragraph, some confusion may still result if the reader's locality falls on or very near the line that divides the range of one or more subspecies. Again, the reader's solution is to avail himself of the information provided for all those subspecies whose ranges are contiguous with the reader's locality.*

*Finally, one other confusing issue of which the reader should remain aware is the fact that the characteristics that define a population of animals as a subspecies most often change gradually rather than abruptly. Thus, a snake seen on or near the line of division between the ranges of two subspecies will probably exhibit characters common to both subspecies. In other words, it will have the appearance of being a "cross" between the two subspecies. This condition is known to biologists as "intergradation," and it is a very common occurrence among snakes. For example, if the reader's locality on the range map places them on or near the line of division between the range of the Northern Copperhead and the Southern Copperhead, a copperhead from this locale may exhibit characteristics of either the northern or southern race; or, most likely, both. The result is that a copperhead from such a locality, while still readily identifiable as a copperhead, will look more like a "cross" or "intergrade" between the northern and southern races, rather than being exactly like one or the other.* **EXPLANATION OF THE TEXT**

### **SECTION—(PART 3)**

*For the benefit of those readers who wish to obtain more detailed information beyond just identifying a given snake, there is a written text section (Part 3) in this book that provides natural history information on all of America's venomous snakes.*

*At the end of each photo caption (Part 2) will be listed the page upon which the written information for that snake can be found. In this section the reader will be provided with a description of the natural*

history of the snake, as well as the author's personal observations and experiences regarding that species (or subspecies). In instances where the snake identified is represented by more than one subspecies, the written text will begin with information that is common to all subspecies, while the subsequent pages will provide information specific to each individual subspecies. **INDIVIDUAL RANGE MAPS**

In the text section where natural history information is provided on each species and subspecies of a venomous snake, a range map is also provided that shows the approximate range in the United States of the snake under discussion. Taking note of these individual range maps is a valuable tool in identifying a snake. If you think the snake you saw was a copperhead, but the range map shows that copperheads are not found within your area, the odds are good that the snake you saw was not a copperhead. It should be noted that the range maps are close approximations only, but still are a useful way to quickly eliminate many snakes that are not found within the reader's area.

### **EXPLANATION OF THE USE OF SCIENTIFIC NAMES**

For those readers not familiar with scientific names or the concept of species and subspecies, the following explanation is provided.

Scientific names are based on the ancient languages of Latin or Greek, which makes them sound foreign to the average person with little or no background in biology. The purpose of scientific names is to avoid confusion among scientists around the world. The name "Timber Rattlesnake" in English, when translated into German or Spanish, may mean something quite different. But the scientific name of the Timber Rattlesnake, *Crotalus horridus*, is universal and used worldwide. Thus a Japanese scientist communicating with a German scientist would use the scientific name and both will know which animal is being discussed. This method of naming organisms can be useful even when communicating with individuals who speak the same language, since some animals may be called by different common names in different areas of the country. For instance, the snake known as a cottonmouth in Kentucky may be called water moccasin in Alabama.

Every species of animal and plant known to science has been assigned a scientific name that has two parts. The first name tells scientists the genus of the organism. The genus is a grouping of related species. Both timber rattlesnakes and eastern diamondback rattlesnakes belong to the genus *Crotalus*, which means that they are related species. The second name, or species name, is specific to that individual animal. Only one type of rattlesnake belonging to the genus *Crotalus* will have the species name *horridus*. In many cases, as in this book, a third scientific name is often employed. This third name refers to a race or subspecies of a given species. For example, the Timber Rattlesnake occurs in two distinct geographic forms, a northern mountain race known as subspecies *horridus* (the full scientific name being written as *Crotalus horridus horridus*) and a southern lowland race or subspecies known as the canebrake rattlesnake, subspecies *atricaudatus*, with the full scientific name being written as (*Crotalus horridus atricaudatus*). Whenever the reader sees a scientific name with three parts, the reader will know that there is more than one geographic form of that particular snake. If only a two part scientific name is given, as in the case of the eastern diamondback rattlesnake (*Crotalus adamanteus*), the reader will know that there is only one geographic race of that particular animal. Note: Throughout this book the terms race and subspecies are used interchangeably.

### **NOTE:**

Throughout this book the terms race and subspecies are used interchangeably.

The author is well aware that individuals lacking a background in biology may find this explanation of the concept of species and subspecies confusing, and thus offers the following analogy that all laymen can relate to and understand. The domestic dog goes by the scientific name *Canis familiaris*, *Canis* being the genus name. Wolves and Coyotes, which are obviously closely related to dogs, are thus also placed in the

*genus canis, but each is a different species. The wolf is Canis lupus, and the coyote Canis latrans. Thus, the dog, the wolf, and the coyote are all different species, but still closely related enough to belong to the same genus. The term subspecies is used to denote a grouping of related species. For example, German shepherds and beagles are both members of species familiaris. But they are obviously two different kinds of dogs, and if they were wild animals, they would be recognized as two different subspecies of the species familiaris. Since the differences in dogs is man made through selective breeding, science avoids using the term subspecies for different types of dogs, and instead employs the term "breed" to distinguish the different forms of domestic dog. Many scientists I know will likely cringe at this explanation of scientific nomenclature (the science of naming organisms), but the goal here is to help the lay person understand the concept of species and subspecies.* **SOME COMMENTS ON SNAKEBITE**

*First and foremost, let me state unequivocally that adequate treatment for snakebite is available only at a medical facility. The various "first-aid" measures extolled over the years (cut and suck, pack in ice, ligatures, etc.) have been proven to be largely ineffective to counterproductive and sometimes downright dangerous. Among the advice given in the arena of first aid for snakebite today are such catch 22s as "keep the victim immobilized," and "get to a hospital as soon as possible." Such advice never seems to address the dilemma of the person alone or in a small group in the outdoors far from a hospital. How a turkey hunter bitten a half-mile from his truck located 20 miles from the nearest hospital can get there "as soon as possible" while "remaining immobilized" is never discussed in advice on snakebite first aid.*

*Don't despair! There is much good news about snakebite in the United States, beginning with the fact that most individuals bitten are less than an hour from the nearest hospital. Once at the hospital, a very effective therapy for snakebite exists, and fewer than three people out of a hundred bitten will die from the bite of a venomous snake in the United States. The antivenin used to treat snakebite is highly effective in neutralizing the venom, and recent developments in the manufacture of antivenin promise to make it even more therapeutic. The author estimates as many as 75 percent of snakebites would not prove fatal even without treatment due to the fact that very often only a small amount of venom and sometimes none at all is injected by the snake. Snake venom evolved primarily as a means of securing the snake's food, and most snakes striking in defense will not inject a large amount of venom. The worst snakebites usually happen to those who work with snakes in captivity and are bitten while attempting to feed the snake. When feeding, the snake will inject a maximum amount of venom in order to kill the prey quickly before it can escape. The other type of serious snakebite usually involves a highly agitated snake that is either being handled or beaten over the head with a stick. All snakebite experts agree that the best way to get bitten in the outdoors (and, in fact the way most bites occur) is in the attempt to kill or capture the offending snake. I have spent countless hours in the outdoors, much of them in remote wilderness, actively looking for venomous snakes, and have never been bitten by a venomous snake in the wild. Though I have been bitten more than once, every bite occurred while working in a venom production laboratory or while involved in the routine maintenance of snakes in captivity. Snakes in the wild are typically very peaceful, reclusive animals that loathe a fight. In my experience I can honestly say that the average person who enjoys the outdoors should be more concerned about being killed by a dead snag or a bolt of lightning! Still, if a giant, two-legged monster like a human comes stomping up on a snake, and the snake sees no immediate way to withdraw or remain hidden, it might bite. And if it does bite, it might inject a lethal dose of venom, and if it does that, you might die!*

*"...75 percent of snakebites would not prove fatal even without treatment due to the fact that very often only a small amount of venom and sometimes none at all is injected by the snake.*

*For those with more than a passing interest in snakebite and snake venoms, I recommend as additional reading Snakes of North America by Alan Tennant and R.D. Bartlett. The section on venoms and snakebite is very thorough and well written and though it does contain some technical terminology it is still quite informative and readable, even for those with little or no background in biology or medicine.* **WHAT TO DO IF YOU SEE A SNAKE IN THE OUTDOORS**

*This is one of the most common questions asked of reptile experts by lay people, and the answer is exceedingly simple. Get away from it and leave it alone. For the hunter, backpacker, fisherman, hiker, etc., this is sound advice. It is of course, a different matter when the snake shows up in your backyard. Unless you (and your family) are hardcore nature lovers, it is unlikely that you want a venomous snake sharing your living area, and this would be unwise, exceptionally so if small children are involved. Children can and should be educated about snakes but, because of their natural curiosity and lack of awareness of danger, small children are often exceptionally vulnerable to snakebite, and once bitten their tiny bodies are too often unable to fight off the ravages of venom. In such a case, I reluctantly agree that a venomous snake cannot be allowed to share one's living space and for most people the safest way to dispose of it is to kill it. Don't kill harmless snakes! Their presence is very often a deterrent to the presence of dangerous species. Many harmless snakes will compete with venomous snakes for food and territory, and several, like the wide-spread kingsnakes, will regularly kill and eat venomous snakes. Members of the harmless racer clan are all confirmed eaters of venomous snakes and their young.*

*The safest way to kill a venomous snake if you don't have a gun is to use a long handle weapon like a garden hoe. In fact, if I were given the task of designing a primitive tool for killing snakes, I couldn't come up with a better utensil. Countless millions of snakes have likely been killed with this instrument over the years. Sadly, most were undoubtedly harmless and useful species. It should be noted that the severed head of a snake can still bite and inject a lethal dose of venom for quite some time after being removed from the body. Thus, extreme caution is advised in disposing of a recently dispatched venomous snake.*

*Many of my fellow reptile enthusiasts will no doubt howl with disgust on reading my instructions on how to kill a venomous snake. While I share their concerns regarding the shrinking ranges and rapid disappearance of many American snake species, I am gravely concerned about the threat these animals can pose to toddlers and small children and feel that the advice given above is the only morally responsible approach.*

*If, however, you encounter a snake in the wilderness, on state park or federally owned land, or even while hiking through some out-of-the-way woodland or field, you are no longer in your backyard, but in the backyard of the wild things that make this earth such a fascinating, miraculous place to live. Even dangerous snakes have the right to exist in places, and like all living things, play a roll in a scheme so grand it is beyond our ability to fathom. PIT VIPERS AND CORAL SNAKES*

VENOMOUS Elliptical pupil and pit

NON-VENOMOUS Round pupil

*America's venomous snakes are divided into two main groups. The largest group, known as the pit vipers, includes rattlesnakes, cottonmouths, and copperheads. Pit vipers are easily recognized by their elliptical pupils and the presence of a heat-sensory "pit" located on the side of the face between the eye and the nostril. The pit is a heat-sensitive organ that permits the snake to detect the body heat of warm-blooded prey, allowing it to strike accurately at night or in the darkness of an underground burrow. The drawing and photo clearly show the characteristics that identify a snake as a member of the pit viper group. It should be noted that while the presence of the pit and an elliptical pupil are foolproof indicators of the fact that a snake is venomous, the use of this method on a live snake in the field involves some risk. Often, getting close enough to see these identifying characters means being close enough to get bitten! The drawings and photograph are useful in identifying pit vipers only. Not all venomous snakes in the United States are pit vipers!*

**PHOTO #1 Osage Copperhead** (*Agkistrodon contortrix phaeogaster*)

***This closeup of the head of the osage copperhead clearly shows both the pit and the elliptical pupil, which are characteristics of all pit vipers.***

NON-VENOMOUS

**Scarlet Kingsnake**

Red rings bordered by black

VENOMOUS

**Eastern Coral Snake**

Red rings bordered by yellow

*Our other group of venomous snakes, the coral snakes, lack the pit and also have round pupils. Coral snakes are identified by color and pattern. The red, yellow, and black rings of coral snakes are distinctive, readily observed characteristics. However, not all snakes with these bright colors are venomous. Several harmless snake species closely resemble the coral snakes in color and pattern. To identify a coral snake, pay close attention to the arrangement of the colors. On all coral snakes, the red rings are bordered by yellow, while on the harmless mimics, the red rings are bordered by black. The following poem is designed to help remember this color sequence.*

***“Red touches yellow,***

***kill a fellow,***

***red touches black,***

***venom lack.”***

*Note on the drawing of the venomous snake the presence of the heat-sensory pit and the elliptical shape of the pupil, and on the non-venomous snake the absence of a pit and the round pupil. Photo #1 on the opposite page should give the reader an idea of how this appears on a live snake. Remember, these characters relate to pit vipers only (rattlesnakes, copperheads, cottonmouths); the dangerously venomous coral snakes lack the pit and have round pupils.*

**PART 2 USING THIS BOOK**

**TO IDENTIFY**

**A VENOMOUS SNAKE**

*The first step in identifying a venomous snake using this book is to refer to the color-coded map on this*

page and determine in which area of the country you are located. Then use the four steps outlined below. After determining the Venomous Snake Region in which you are located, simply turn to the page(s) of photos of venomous snakes of that region and compare the photos to the snake you have seen. All venomous snakes commonly found within that region will be illustrated. **IDENTIFYING VENOMOUS SNAKES**

*FIRST* — Look at the map on this page and determine in which region of the country you are located.

*SECOND* — Then locate the page number for your region, and turn to that page.

*THIRD* — Compare the photographs of all the venomous snakes of your region to the snake in question. You should also look at the photos of any harmless, non-venomous snakes that may be confused with a venomous species.

*FOURTH* — After determining the identity of the snake in question using the photographs, note the page number for the written text section dealing with that species (or subspecies), and turn to that page for detailed written information about the snake you have identified. Also refer to the range map for that species or subspecies to be certain it occurs in your area.

## **VENOMOUS SNAKE REGIONS OF THE UNITED STATES**

### **PART 2 — VENOMOUS SNAKES OF THE SOUTHEAST REGION**

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This easy-to-use guide is the most comprehensive resource for snake admirers in the United States. Full-color photographs for almost every snake in the country make for easy reference, and dividing the snakes based on their regional habitats makes finding the right snake a breeze. Whether you are trying to identify a western coral snake or its mimic, the sonoran shovel nosed snake, Scott Shupe's guide is the extensive handbook for which all snake aficionados have been waiting. With full-color maps and a thorough glossary of terms, you'll be able to identify Arizona black rattlesnakes, eastern cottonmouths, and more in no time!

Unlike other snake books, Shupe's guide covers the snake population of the entire United States. His expertise and knowledge of snakes is apparent in the thoughtful descriptions and handy hints on how to tell poisonous snakes from their harmless imitators. He also includes an informative natural history of the reptiles and the scientific terms by which they are referred. As a gift for a young naturalist, a reference book for your library, or a handy tool in a sticky situation, this guide is practical, useful, and fun!

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Best PDF Us Guide To Venomous Snakes And Their Mimics - Montana Field Guide contains a wealth of information about Montana's diverse species. Here's a great state-by-state listing of venomous snakes in North America. There is a harmless species of king snake which mimics this coloration (you. coloring sheets, free colouring book, illustrations, printable pictures, clipart, Snake Images With Names - The classic novel of life and death in an American hospital. With a new 3187, SHUPE, SCOTT U.S. GUIDE TO VENOMOUS SNAKES AND THEIR MIMICS Don't Tread On Me! Stoeger Presents An Indispensable Guide - Congolese giant toads may mimic venomous snakes to trick be mimicking Gaboon vipers (head shown at right) that share their territory. [FREE] U.S. Guide to Venomous Snakes and Their Mimics - In their popular field manual, Schmidt and Davis (1941:326) emphasize the resemblances by including a 'extraordinarymimic' of the venomous Coral Snake. Kentucky Snakes - Kentucky Fish and Wildlife - (continued from Bird Watching Tips) Two Major Bird Field Guides: There are two use: National Geographic's Field Guide to the Birds of North America and .. The definitive and most respected guide to Australian bird identification, this book.. A large non-venomous snake found in southern regions of Western Australia. Scott Shupe Books - Some of us have nightmares about centipedes. First, let's guide you through getting rid of house centipedes. of the "poisonous snakes and bees" wondering if the bees were poisonous as well. Their Larger ones may be able to puncture human skin with their venomous claws... My books are available from Amazon. Jungle boa size - A clinician's guide to Australian venomous bites and stings : incorporating the production expertise and manufacturing plants in the US, UK and Australia. There is limited information on envenoming by snakes of the genus to prevent acute adverse reactions Books online: Toxicology Handbook, 2015, Fishpond. com. Pet gaboon viper - Booktopia has U.S. Guide to Venomous Snakes and Their Mimics by Scott Shupe. Buy a discounted Wishlist. Wishlist. Earn 55 Qantas Points on this Book Venomoid For Sale - redaktionsbuero-rupprecht.de - See a list of the most dangerous animals that live in South America. prey species provides a perfect backdrop for the evolution of large snake species. of South America Facts Pack is a printable PDF eBook containing information on 20 nine different animals that will accompany him or her through life, acting as guides. Lizards names and pictures - 2-255 - Bevaka U.S. Guide to Venomous Snakes and Their Mimics sÃ¥ fÃ¥r du ett mejl nÃ¥r Unlike other snake books, Shupe's guide covers the snake population of the Scott Shupe Books - Verkauf und Versand durch LABYRINTH BOOKS. FÃ¼r weitere Informationen. U.s. Guide To Venomous Snakes And Their Mimics. Scott Shupe. Gebundene

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