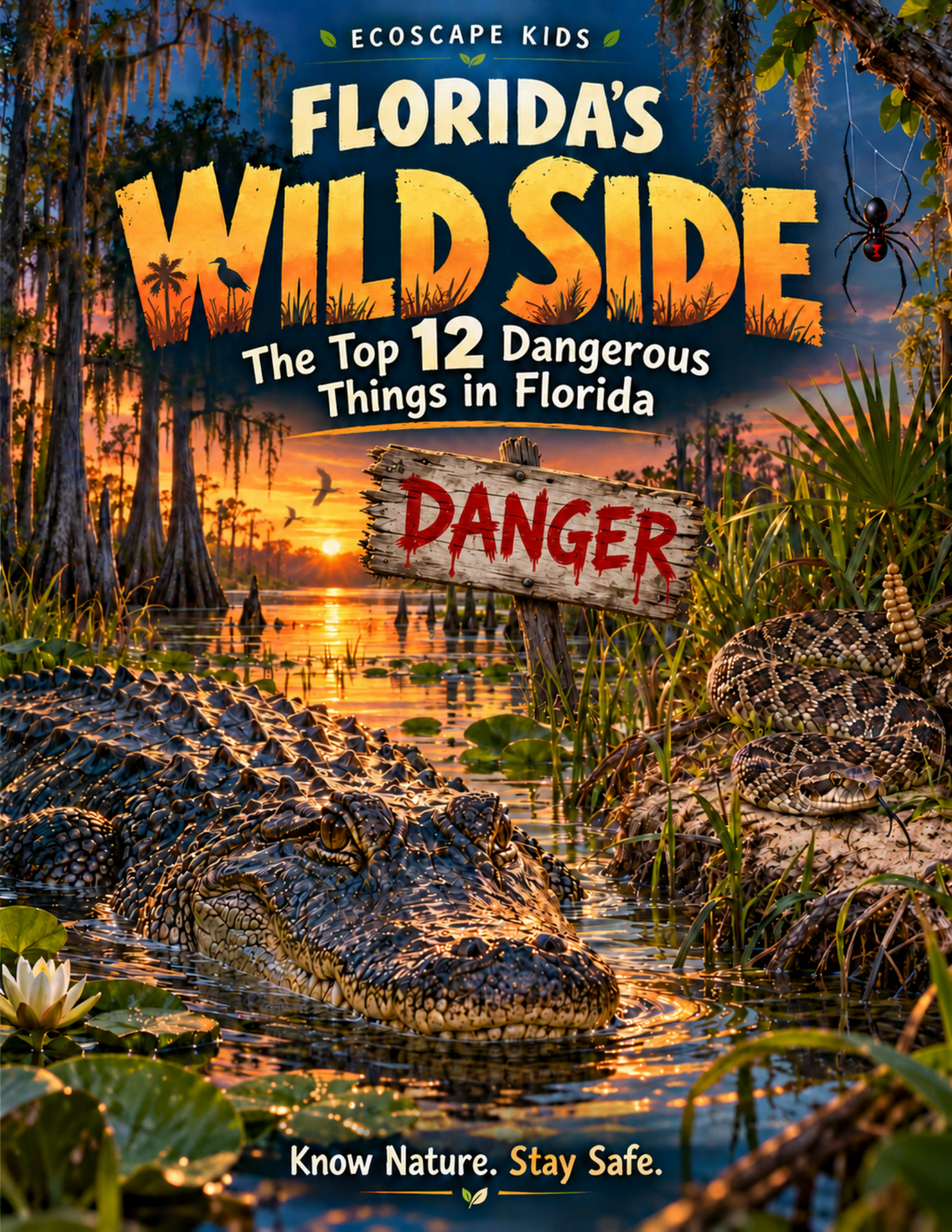

ECOSCAPE KIDS
FLORIDA'S
WILD SIDE
The Top 12 Dangerous Things in Florida
DANGER
Know Nature. Stay Safe.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

Explore With Respect

Twelve Florida animals. Three ways to learn about each one.

A BOOK FOR CURIOUS KIDS

Meet twelve Florida animals with powerful bites, venom, stinging spines or other defenses. Their abilities help them survive. Understanding them helps you explore with respect.

THREE PAGES PER ANIMAL

Start with a dramatic encounter and safe boundaries. Then explore the science through close-ups and illustrated scenes. Finish with a detailed field guide. These are photorealistic illustrations, not photographs. Animals are not shown to scale.

LOOK. GIVE SPACE. TELL AN ADULT.

Explore with a responsible adult. Never touch, feed, chase or capture wildlife. Do not reach into hidden spaces or disturb nests. Follow trail signs, beach warnings and lifeguard instructions.

GET HELP PROMPTLY

Tell an adult about every bite or sting. Call 911 for a suspected venomous snakebite, breathing trouble, collapse or serious injury. Do not cut a snakebite, suck out venom, apply ice or use a tourniquet.

POISON HELP: 1-800-222-1222

An adult should call for advice about bites, stings and toxin exposures. Call 911 first in an emergency. Never catch an animal to identify it. Sources and useful safety links appear in the back index.

Ecoscape Outdoor Services, LLC | Ecoscape Kids

Illustrations vary from living animals. Read names and details with an adult.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

AMERICAN ALLIGATOR

POWER AT THE WATER'S EDGE

Alligator mississippiensis

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Much of an alligator's body stays hidden beneath the water.

GIVE IT SPACE

Stay back from alligators and the water's edge. Never approach a nest or young.



NEVER FEED ONE

Feeding teaches alligators to associate people with food.

SWIM SMART

Swim only in designated areas during daylight with an adult.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

AMERICAN ALLIGATOR

BUILT TO HUNT

Alligator mississippiensis



FEELING THE RIPPLES

Tiny sensory organs around the jaws detect disturbances in the water.

UNDERWATER VISION

A transparent third eyelid helps protect the eyes underwater.

WAIT. THEN MOVE.

An alligator often waits for prey, then moves with a sudden burst of speed.

TEETH THAT RETURN

Alligators replace worn or lost teeth throughout their lives.

AN ANCIENT BODY PLAN

Alligators are reptiles. Their distant relatives lived alongside dinosaurs.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

AMERICAN ALLIGATOR

Alligator mississippiensis

FIELD GUIDE • FACTS & IDENTIFICATION



MEET THE AMERICAN ALLIGATOR

This large, mostly freshwater reptile lives in Florida's lakes, rivers, marshes and ponds. Its broad snout, armored back and muscular tail suit life in the water. Alligators are predators, but they usually avoid people when left alone.

QUICK FACTS

Animal group:	Reptile
Scientific family:	Alligatoridae
Florida status:	Native
Typical adult length:	About 8–11 feet
Food:	Fish, turtles, birds and other animals
Young:	Hatch from eggs
Body temperature:	Depends on the environment

HOW TO RECOGNIZE IT

Look for a broad, rounded snout and dark gray body. Young alligators have pale yellow bands. Never approach an animal to check its teeth or markings.

LIFE IN THE SWAMP

Alligators bask to warm up and use water or shade to cool down. Their eyes and nostrils sit high on the head. A powerful tail supplies swimming force.

FROM NEST TO YOUNG

Females build mounds of vegetation and lay eggs inside. Nest temperature influences whether hatchlings develop as males or females. Mothers guard nests and protect their young.

A ROLE IN THE FOOD WEB

Young alligators eat small prey and also become food for larger animals. Adults hunt a wider range of prey. Wetland habitats support both alligators and the animals they eat.

LOOK-ALIKE: AMERICAN CROCODILE

Crocodiles usually have a narrower snout and paler coloring. Florida has both species. Keep your distance from either one.



RESPECT THE DANGER

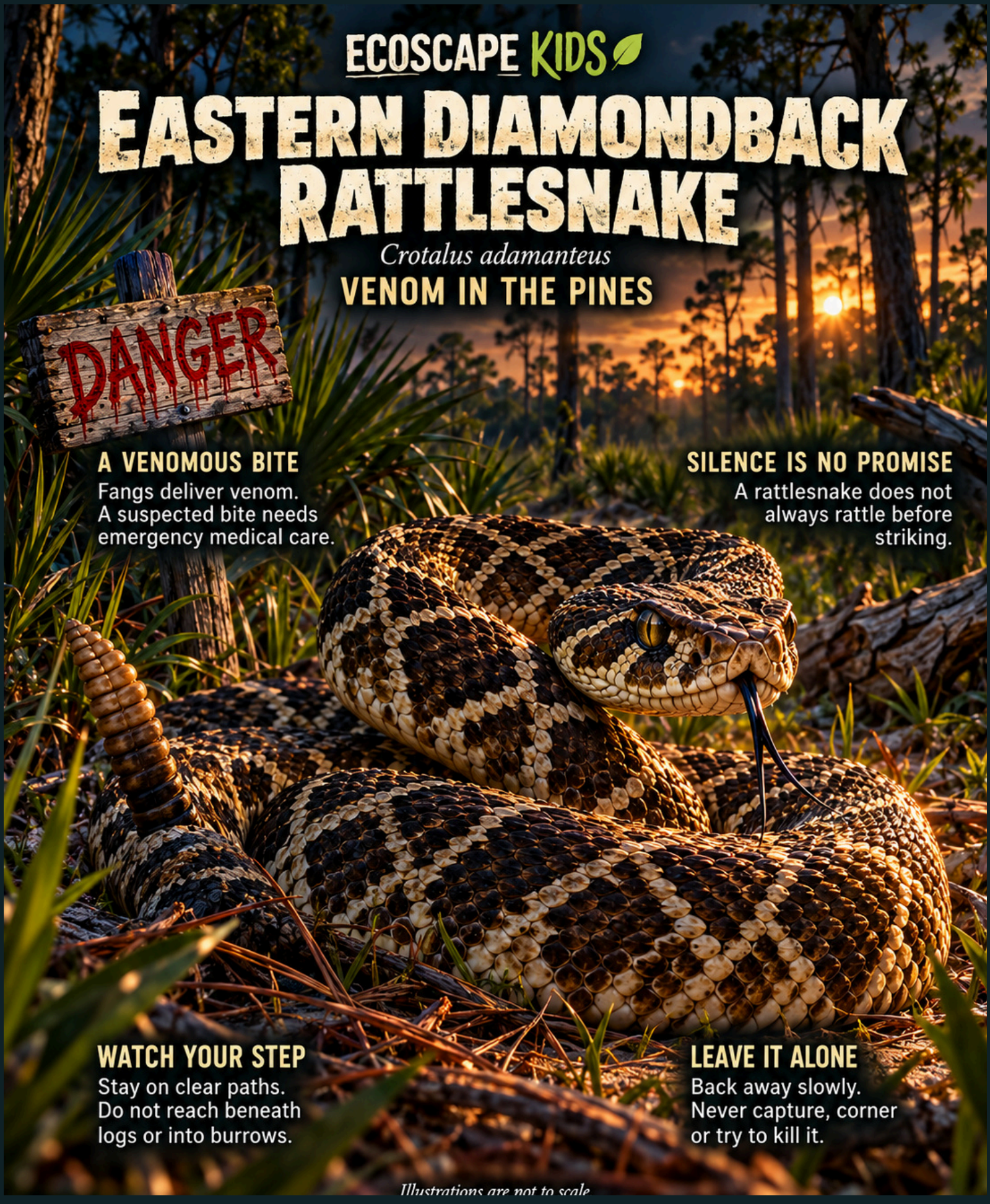
Never feed or approach an alligator. Stay back from water edges. Swim only in designated areas during daylight with an adult.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

EASTERN DIAMONDBACK RATTLESNAKE

Crotalus adamanteus

VENOM IN THE PINES



A VENOMOUS BITE

Fangs deliver venom. A suspected bite needs emergency medical care.

SILENCE IS NO PROMISE

A rattlesnake does not always rattle before striking.

WATCH YOUR STEP

Stay on clear paths. Do not reach beneath logs or into burrows.

LEAVE IT ALONE

Back away slowly. Never capture, corner or try to kill it.

Illustrations are not to scale

ECOSCAPE KIDS

EASTERN DIAMONDBACK RATTLESNAKE

Crotalus adamanteus

BUILT TO SURVIVE



HEAT SENSING
Facial pits detect heat from nearby warm prey.

CHEMICAL CLUES
A flicking tongue collects particles for a special sensing organ in the mouth.

A RATTLE OF KERATIN
Loose segments vibrate together. Keratin also makes your fingernails.

NOT AN AGE CLOCK
New rattle segments form during shedding. Broken pieces make counting unreliable.

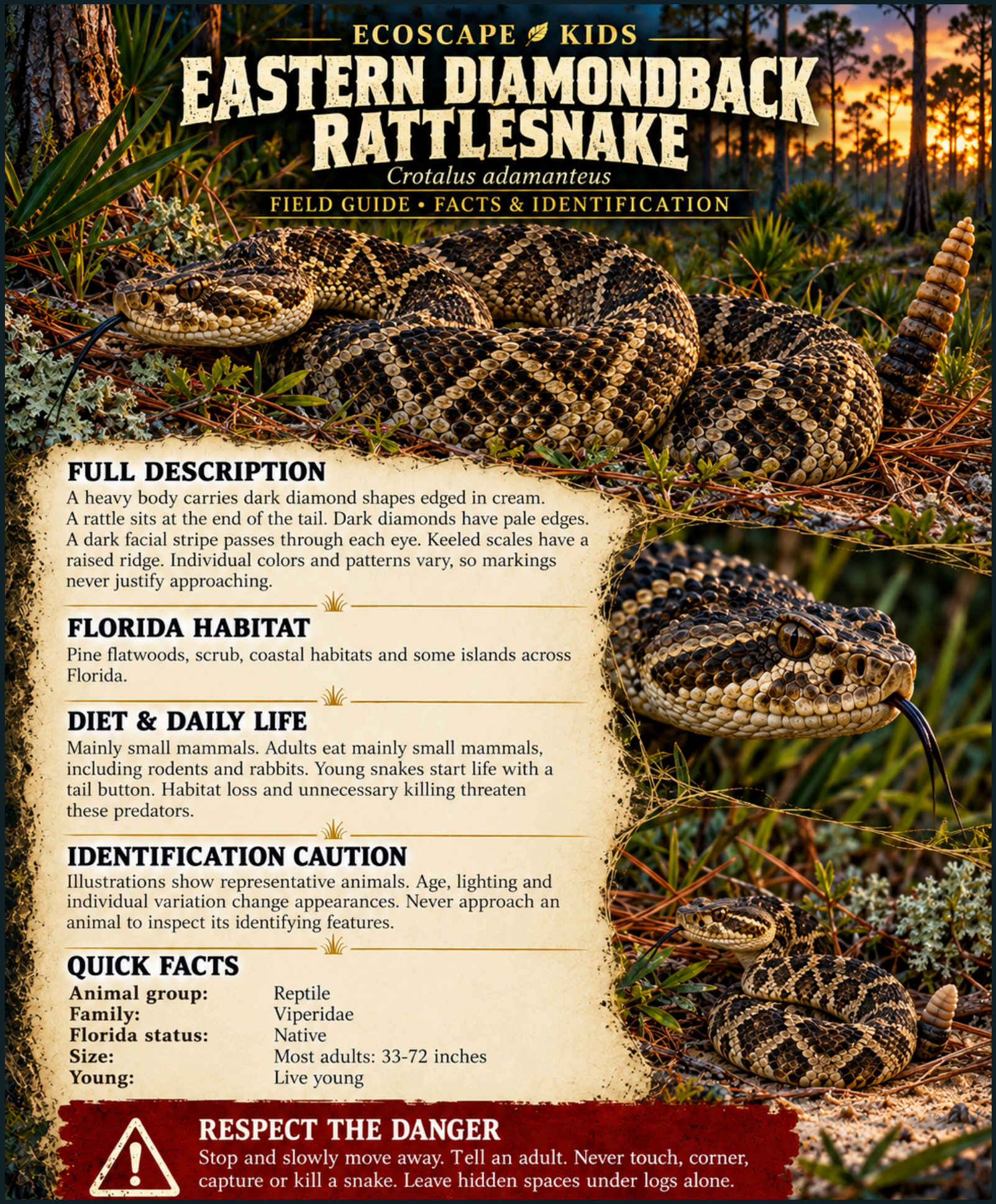
AN AMBUSH STRATEGY
Camouflage helps this predator wait without being noticed.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

EASTERN DIAMONDBACK RATTLESNAKE

Crotalus adamanteus

FIELD GUIDE • FACTS & IDENTIFICATION



FULL DESCRIPTION

A heavy body carries dark diamond shapes edged in cream. A rattle sits at the end of the tail. Dark diamonds have pale edges. A dark facial stripe passes through each eye. Keeled scales have a raised ridge. Individual colors and patterns vary, so markings never justify approaching.

FLORIDA HABITAT

Pine flatwoods, scrub, coastal habitats and some islands across Florida.

DIET & DAILY LIFE

Mainly small mammals. Adults eat mainly small mammals, including rodents and rabbits. Young snakes start life with a tail button. Habitat loss and unnecessary killing threaten these predators.

IDENTIFICATION CAUTION

Illustrations show representative animals. Age, lighting and individual variation change appearances. Never approach an animal to inspect its identifying features.

QUICK FACTS

Animal group:	Reptile
Family:	Viperidae
Florida status:	Native
Size:	Most adults: 33-72 inches
Young:	Live young

RESPECT THE DANGER

Stop and slowly move away. Tell an adult. Never touch, corner, capture or kill a snake. Leave hidden spaces under logs alone.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

FLORIDA COTTONMOUTH

Agkistrodon conanti

DANGER AT THE WATERLINE



WATER'S EDGE

A cottonmouth lives near water and also travels over land.

A WARNING DISPLAY

An open white mouth is a defensive warning. Give the snake room.

LOOK FROM FAR AWAY

Do not move closer to inspect eyes, markings or teeth.

AFTER A BITE

Tell an adult and get emergency help immediately. Do not wait for symptoms.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

FLORIDA COTTONMOUTH

BUILT TO SURVIVE

Agkistrodon conanti



A PALE SIGNAL
The white mouth lining gives the cottonmouth its name.

HEAT DETECTORS
Like other pit vipers, it has small heat-sensing pits near the snout.

CHANGING COLORS
Patterns often fade as a young snake grows into a dark adult.

A YOUNG HUNTER'S LURE
A bright yellow juvenile tail tip helps attract small prey.

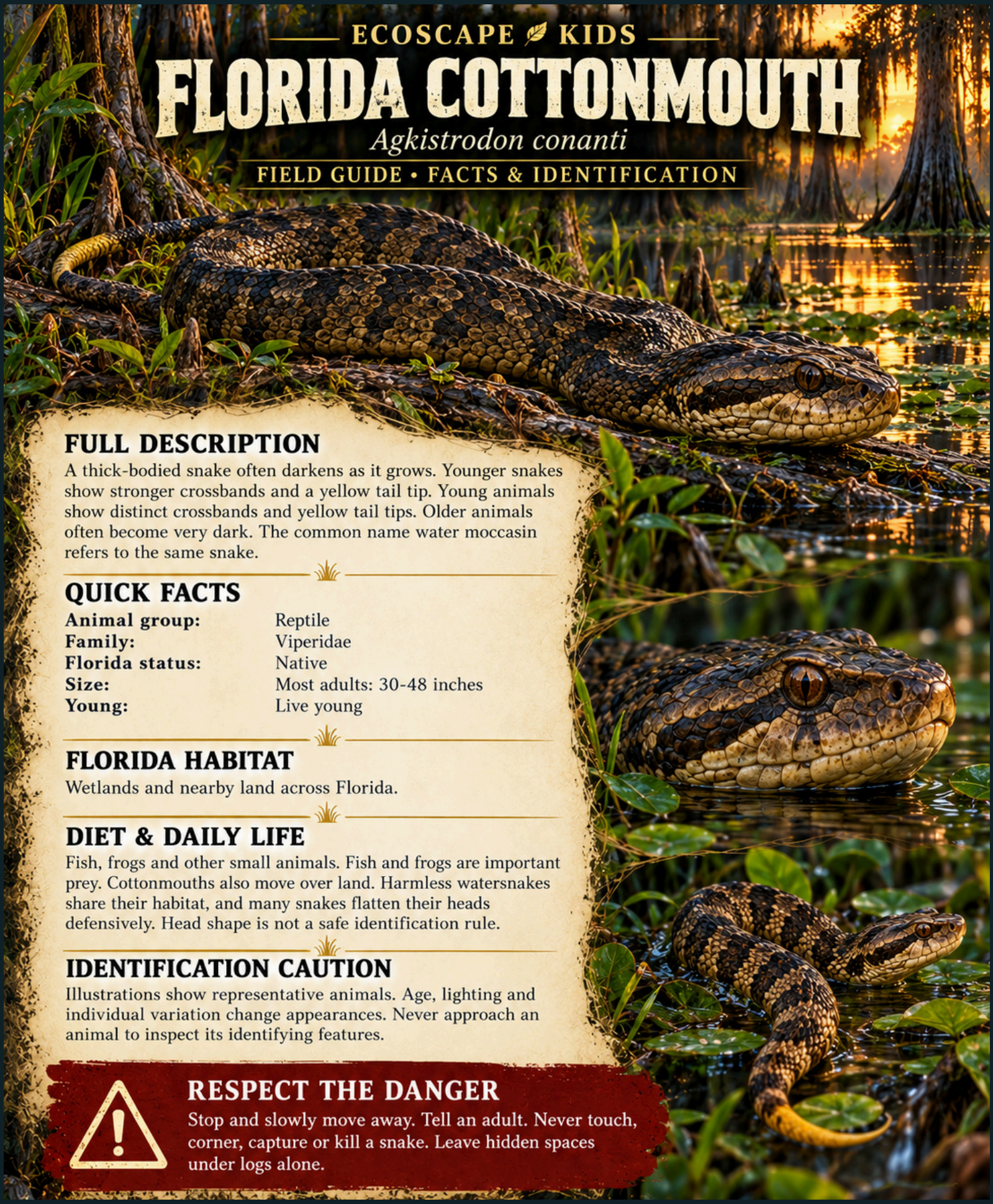
SCENT AND MOVEMENT
Tongue flicks gather chemical information from the surroundings.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

FLORIDA COTTONMOUTH

Agkistrodon conanti

FIELD GUIDE • FACTS & IDENTIFICATION



FULL DESCRIPTION

A thick-bodied snake often darkens as it grows. Younger snakes show stronger crossbands and a yellow tail tip. Young animals show distinct crossbands and yellow tail tips. Older animals often become very dark. The common name water moccasin refers to the same snake.

QUICK FACTS

Animal group:	Reptile
Family:	Viperidae
Florida status:	Native
Size:	Most adults: 30-48 inches
Young:	Live young

FLORIDA HABITAT

Wetlands and nearby land across Florida.

DIET & DAILY LIFE

Fish, frogs and other small animals. Fish and frogs are important prey. Cottonmouths also move over land. Harmless watersnakes share their habitat, and many snakes flatten their heads defensively. Head shape is not a safe identification rule.

IDENTIFICATION CAUTION

Illustrations show representative animals. Age, lighting and individual variation change appearances. Never approach an animal to inspect its identifying features.

RESPECT THE DANGER

Stop and slowly move away. Tell an adult. Never touch, corner, capture or kill a snake. Leave hidden spaces under logs alone.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

EASTERN CORAL SNAKE

Micrurus fulvius

BRILLIANT COLORS. SERIOUS VENOM.

SMALL BUT VENOMOUS
A slender body does not make this snake safe to touch.



HIDDEN SPACES
Leave leaf litter, logs and holes undisturbed.

NO COLOR RHYMES
Similar colors appear on harmless snakes. A rhyme is not a handling rule.

HANDS OFF
Never pick up a wild snake. A suspected bite needs emergency care.

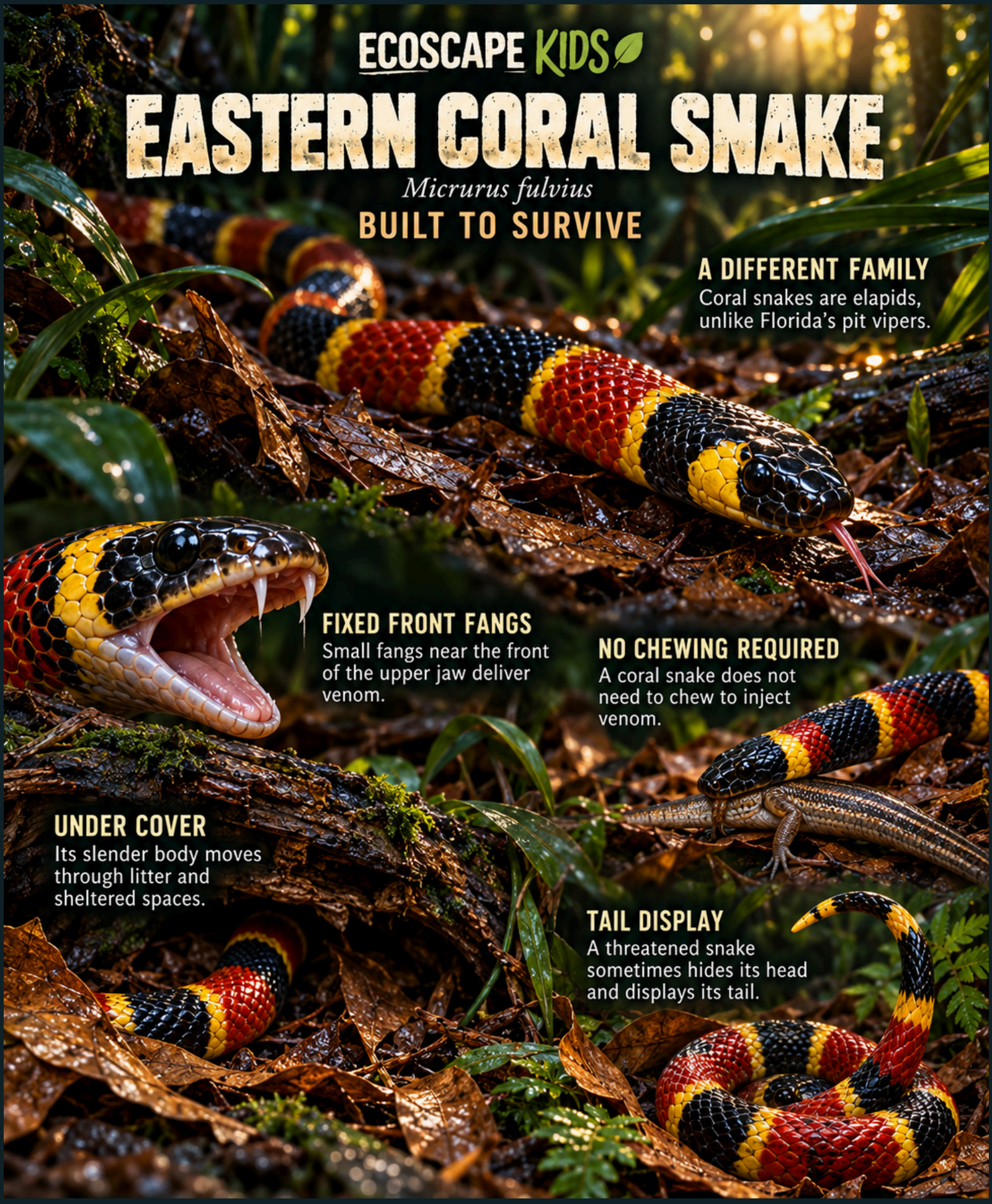
Illustrations are not to scale.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

EASTERN CORAL SNAKE

Micrurus fulvius

BUILT TO SURVIVE



A DIFFERENT FAMILY
Coral snakes are elapids, unlike Florida's pit vipers.

FIXED FRONT FANGS
Small fangs near the front of the upper jaw deliver venom.

NO CHEWING REQUIRED
A coral snake does not need to chew to inject venom.

UNDER COVER
Its slender body moves through litter and sheltered spaces.

TAIL DISPLAY
A threatened snake sometimes hides its head and displays its tail.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

EASTERN CORAL SNAKE

Micrurus fulvius

FIELD GUIDE • FACTS & IDENTIFICATION



FULL DESCRIPTION

Also called the harlequin coralsnake. A slender body carries red, yellow and black rings, with a black snout. Also called the harlequin coralsnake. A small head blends into the neck. Red and black rings are separated by narrow yellow rings. The snout is black and rounded.

FLORIDA HABITAT

Leaf litter, loose soil and sheltered places across much of Florida.

DIET & DAILY LIFE

Small snakes and other slender prey. It hunts small snakes and lizards by moving through covered spaces. Females lay leathery eggs. Similar-colored harmless snakes exist, so never rely on a rhyme to decide whether to touch one.

IDENTIFICATION CAUTION

Illustrations show representative animals. Age, lighting and individual variation change appearances. Never approach an animal to inspect its identifying features.

QUICK FACTS

Animal group:	Reptile
Family:	Elapidae
Florida status:	Native
Size:	Most adults: 20–30 inches
Young:	Eggs

RESPECT THE DANGER

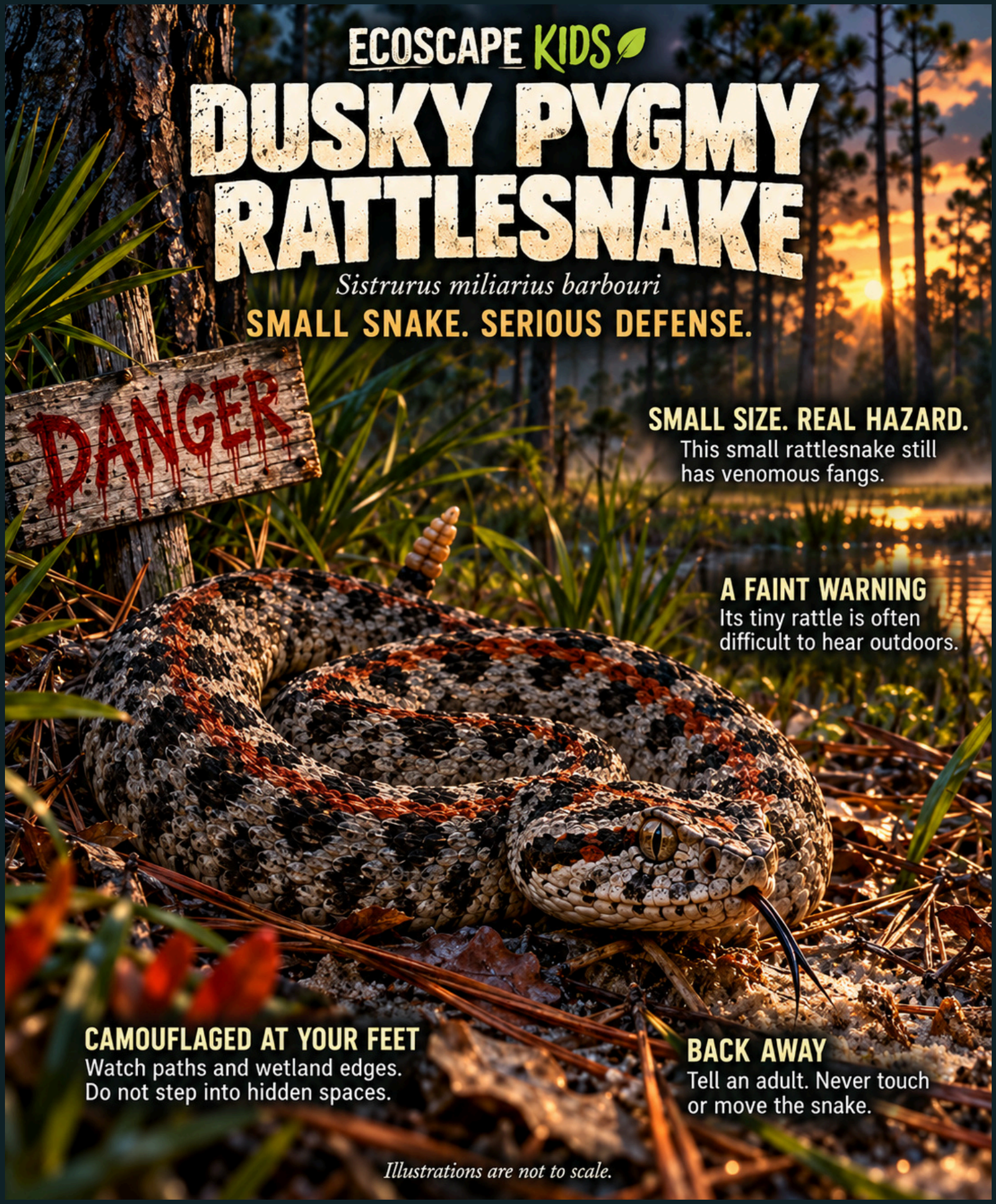
Stop and slowly move away. Tell an adult. Never touch, corner, capture or kill a snake. Leave hidden spaces under logs alone.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

DUSKY PYGMY RATTLESNAKE

Sistrurus miliarius barbouri

SMALL SNAKE. SERIOUS DEFENSE.



SMALL SIZE. REAL HAZARD.
This small rattlesnake still has venomous fangs.

A FAINT WARNING
Its tiny rattle is often difficult to hear outdoors.

CAMOUFLAGED AT YOUR FEET
Watch paths and wetland edges. Do not step into hidden spaces.

BACK AWAY
Tell an adult. Never touch or move the snake.

Illustrations are not to scale.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

DUSKY PYGMY RATTLESNAKE

BUILT TO SURVIVE

Sistrurus miliarius barbouri

A MINIATURE RATTLE

A tiny tail rattle produces only a faint sound.



SMALL PREY

Frogs and lizards fit the feeding needs of this compact predator.

HEAT AND SCENT

Facial pits and a flicking tongue provide different kinds of information.

A YELLOW TIP

A young snake's tail looks different from an adult's tail.

A BROKEN OUTLINE

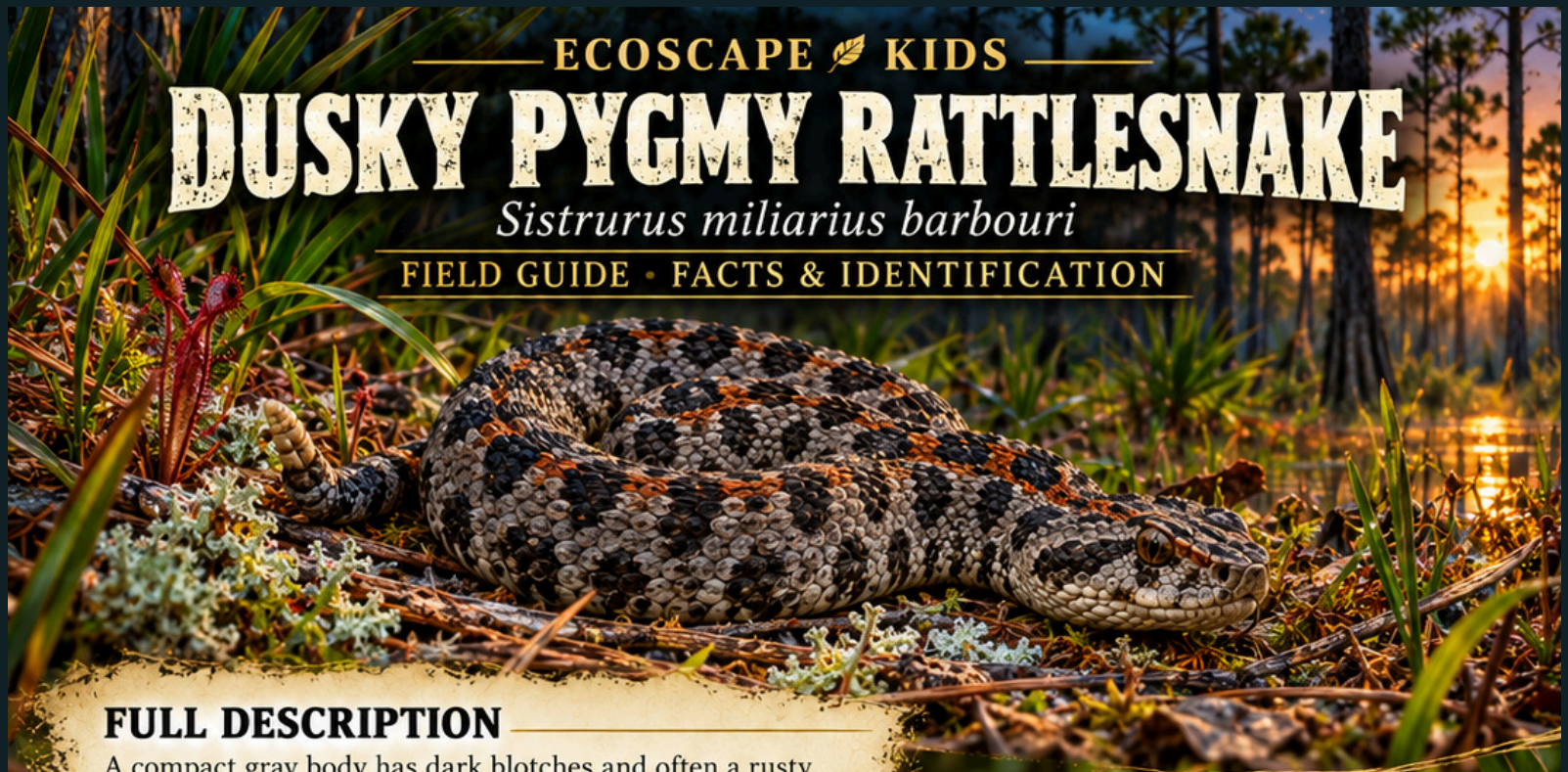
Blotches blend into shadows and patches of ground.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

DUSKY PYGMY RATTLESNAKE

Sistrurus miliarius barbouri

FIELD GUIDE • FACTS & IDENTIFICATION



FULL DESCRIPTION

A compact gray body has dark blotches and often a rusty central stripe. The rattle is tiny. This short snake has a thick body, gray coloring and dark blotches. A reddish central stripe is often visible. It is not known from the Florida Keys.

FLORIDA HABITAT

Flatwoods, wetland edges, canal banks and other mainland habitats.

QUICK FACTS:

Animal group:	Reptile
Family:	Viperidae
Florida status:	Native
Size:	Most adults: 12-24 inches
Young:	Live young

DIET & DAILY LIFE

Small frogs, lizards and other small animals. Young snakes have bright yellow tail tips. Frogs, lizards and other small animals supply food. Its camouflage helps it remain unnoticed. A small snake still deserves plenty of space.

IDENTIFICATION CAUTION

Illustrations show representative animals. Age, lighting and individual variation change appearances. Never approach an animal to inspect its identifying features.



RESPECT THE DANGER

Stop and slowly move away. Tell an adult. Never touch, corner, capture or kill a snake. Leave hidden spaces under logs alone.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

SOUTHERN BLACK WIDOW

Latrodectus mactans

DANGER IN THE SHADOWS



A HIDDEN NEIGHBOR

A widow often stays in sheltered, dark outdoor spaces.

A DEFENSIVE BITE

Bites are more likely when a spider is pressed against skin.

CHECK BEFORE REACHING

Ask an adult to check stored gloves, shoes and hidden corners.

AFTER CONTACT

Tell an adult about a suspected bite. Get Poison Help advice promptly.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

SOUTHERN BLACK WIDOW

BUILT TO SURVIVE

Latrodectus mactans



SILK AS A SENSOR

Vibrations in the web help the spider detect trapped prey.

VENOM FOR FEEDING

Fangs introduce venom which helps subdue small prey.

TWO BODY SECTIONS

A spider has a cephalothorax and an abdomen, rather than an insect's three main sections.

EIGHT WALKING LEGS

Adult spiders have eight legs and no antennae.

SPINNING SILK

Spinnerets at the rear release silk used for webs and egg protection.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

SOUTHERN BLACK WIDOW

Latrodectus mactans

FIELD GUIDE • FACTS & IDENTIFICATION



FULL DESCRIPTION

The adult female is glossy black, with a red hourglass on the underside of her rounded abdomen. Adult females have a shiny rounded black abdomen and usually a red hourglass underneath. Males and young spiders look different. Spiderlings molt as they grow.

FLORIDA HABITAT

Sheltered outdoor corners, woodpiles and other protected spaces.

DIET & DAILY LIFE

Insects trapped in silk. A widow uses silk to catch insects rather than chasing large prey. Females enclose eggs in smooth silk sacs. Spiders belong to a different animal group from six-legged insects.

QUICK FACTS

Animal group:	Arachnid
Family:	Theridiidae
Florida status:	Native
Size:	Female body: roughly half an inch
Young:	Eggs inside a silk sac

IDENTIFICATION CAUTION

Illustrations show representative animals. Age, lighting and individual variation change appearances. Never approach an animal to inspect its identifying features.

RESPECT THE DANGER

Never handle spiders or reach beneath objects blindly. Ask an adult to check stored outdoor gloves and shoes.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

RED IMPORTED FIRE ANT

Solenopsis invicta

THE MOUND THAT FIGHTS BACK



A MOUND IS A HOME

Kicking or poking a mound disturbs the colony.

MANY WORKERS

Disturbed ants rush out and sting in defense.

MOVE AWAY

Leave an active mound. Tell an adult if ants reach your skin.

REACTIONS MATTER

Many stings or breathing trouble require urgent help.

Illustrations are not to scale

ECOSCAPE KIDS

RED IMPORTED FIRE ANT

Solenopsis invicta

BUILT TO SURVIVE



GRIP, THEN STING

Mandibles grip while a rear stinger introduces venom.

COLONY TEAMWORK

Workers gather food, tend young and defend the nest.

CHEMICAL MESSAGES

Pheromones help ants recruit nestmates and coordinate activity.

DIFFERENT SIZES

Large and small workers belong to the same species and colony.

A LIFE OF CHANGE

A larva becomes a pupa before emerging as an adult ant.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

RED IMPORTED FIRE ANT

Solenopsis invicta

FIELD GUIDE • FACTS & IDENTIFICATION



FULL DESCRIPTION

Reddish workers live in soil colonies. A mound is a nest, not a harmless pile for kicking. Workers have elbowed antennae and a narrow waist. Several ant species look similar. Color alone does not prove which species is present. Red imported fire ants came from South America.

FLORIDA HABITAT

Lawns, open ground and disturbed soil throughout much of Florida.

DIET & DAILY LIFE

Other small animals and plant-derived foods. Queens lay eggs and workers gather food, care for young and defend the colony. Larvae depend on workers. Fire ants eat other small animals and plant-derived foods, and affect native wildlife.

IDENTIFICATION CAUTION

Illustrations show representative animals. Age, lighting and individual variation change appearances. Never approach an animal to inspect its identifying features.

QUICK FACTS

Animal group:	Insect
Family:	Formicidae
Florida status:	Introduced
Size:	Workers vary within a colony
Young:	Egg, larva, pupa, adult

RESPECT THE DANGER

Leave mounds alone and watch where you stand. Move away from an active mound and tell an adult if ants reach your skin.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

EASTERN YELLOWJACKET

Vespula maculifrons

DANGER BELOW GROUND

THE HIDDEN ENTRANCE

An underground nest is easy to disturb by accident.

MORE THAN ONE STING

A yellowjacket usually keeps its stinger and stings repeatedly.



LEAVE NESTS ALONE

Never poke a hole, throw objects or try to remove a nest.

IF A COLONY ATTACKS

Leave quickly for an enclosed building or vehicle. Alert an adult.

Illustrations are not to scale

ECOSCAPE KIDS

EASTERN YELLOWJACKET

Vespula maculifrons

BUILT TO SURVIVE



PAPER ENGINEERING
Chewed wood fibers and saliva form the nest's paper walls.

CELLS FOR YOUNG
Developing larvae occupy cells in horizontal combs.

A QUEEN'S START
A queen builds and feeds the first young before workers take over many jobs.

SUGAR AND PREY
Adults use sugars for energy and collect animal food for larvae.

REUSABLE DEFENSE
The stinger usually remains with the wasp after a sting.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

EASTERN YELLOWJACKET

Vespula maculifrons

FIELD GUIDE • FACTS & IDENTIFICATION



FULL DESCRIPTION

Yellowjackets are social wasps. A nest contains paper combs surrounded by an outer paper covering. This profile features the eastern yellowjacket. Other yellowjacket species also occur in Florida. The smooth body and narrow waist differ from a honey bee's fuzzier appearance.

FLORIDA HABITAT

Ground nests and other sheltered cavities in Florida.

DIET & DAILY LIFE

Insects and sweet foods. A queen begins a nest and raises the first workers. Later workers gather food and tend the young. Paper combs hold developing larvae. Adult wasps visit sugar sources and collect animal food for larvae.

IDENTIFICATION CAUTION

Illustrations show representative animals. Age, lighting and individual variation change appearances. Never approach an animal to inspect its identifying features.

QUICK FACTS

Animal group:	Insect
Family:	Vespidae
Florida status:	Native
Size:	Small, compact black-and-yellow wasp
Young:	Egg, larva, pupa, adult



RESPECT THE DANGER

Stay away from nest entrances. Do not poke holes or swat at wasps. If a colony attacks, leave quickly for enclosed shelter.


ECOSCAPE KIDS
PUSS CATERPILLAR
Megalopyge opercularis
SOFT LOOK. SHARP DEFENSE.
DO NOT PET IT
Soft-looking hair hides painful stinging spines.
DANGER
BRANCHES AND LEAVES
Accidental contact happens while brushing past plants.
LOOK WITHOUT TOUCHING
Leave unfamiliar caterpillars and occupied leaves alone.
AFTER A STING
Tell an adult immediately. Avoid rubbing the area and contact Poison Help.
Illustrations are not to scale

ECOSCAPE KIDS

PUSS CATERPILLAR

Megalopyge opercularis

BUILT TO SURVIVE

HIDDEN UNDER HAIR

Venomous spines sit beneath the long soft-looking covering.



PRESSURE CAUSES A STING

Contact pushes sharp spines into skin.

A GROWING LARVA

Molts allow the caterpillar to grow through several stages.

A COCOON TRANSFORMATION

Inside its cocoon, a pupa develops into a moth.

A DIFFERENT ADULT

The adult southern flannel moth does not retain the larva's stinging-spine defense.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

PUSS CATERPILLAR

Megalopyge opercularis

FIELD GUIDE • FACTS & IDENTIFICATION



FULL DESCRIPTION

Long hair hides venomous spines. Its soft-looking covering is not safe to touch. The adult is the southern flannel moth. Also called an asp. Hair color varies from pale cream to gray or brown. The tapered furry outline hides the legs and venomous spines. It is not a furry pet or a harmless tuft.

FLORIDA HABITAT

Leaves and branches of Florida trees and shrubs, including oaks and elms.

DIET & DAILY LIFE

Leaves. The adult is the southern flannel moth, with yellowish, hairy-looking wings. The larva spins a cocoon before becoming a moth. Birds, parasites and other natural enemies are part of its food web.

IDENTIFICATION CAUTION

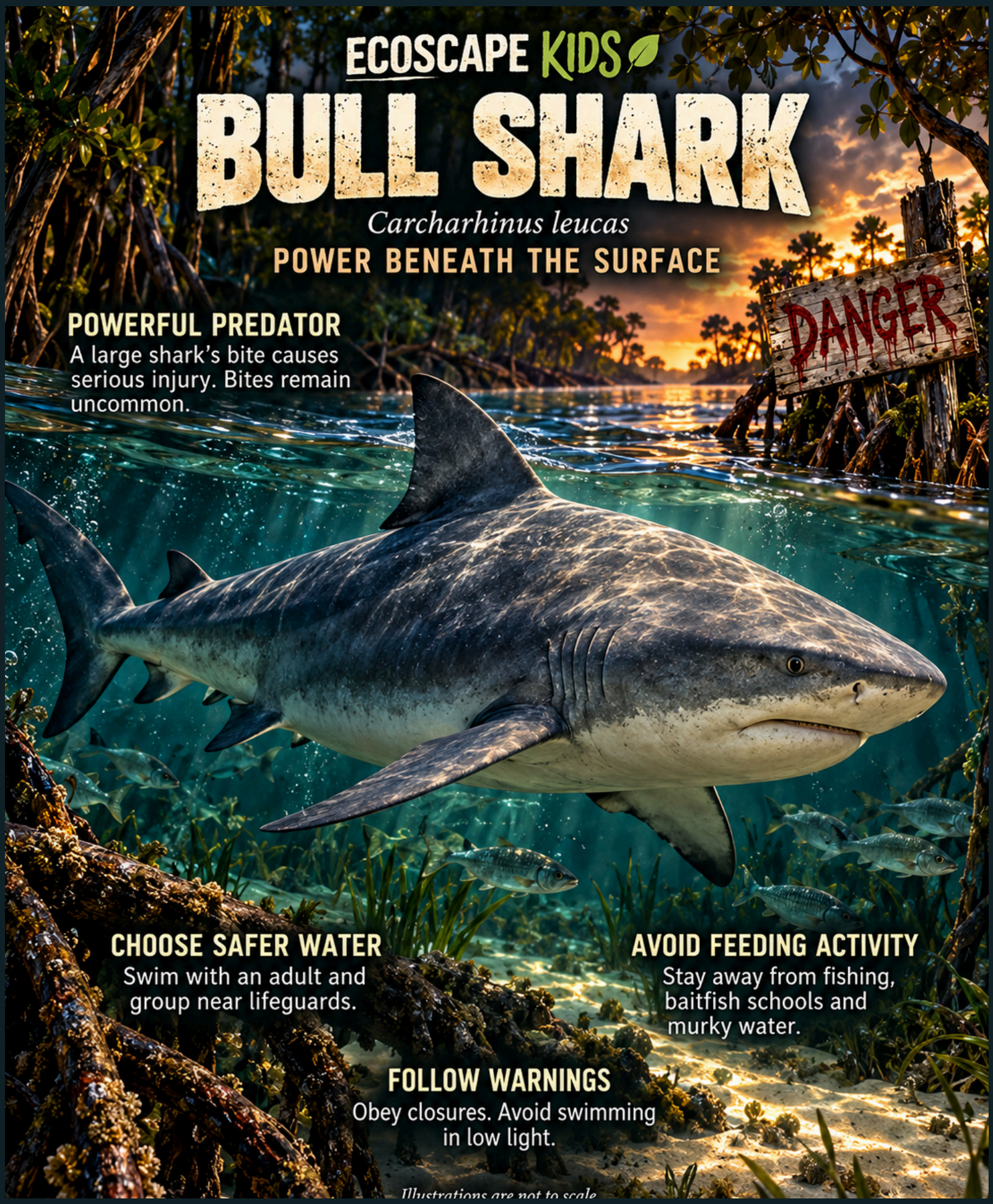
Illustrations show representative animals. Age, lighting and individual variation change appearances. Never approach an animal to inspect its identifying features.

QUICK FACTS

Animal group:	Insect larva
Family:	Megalopygidae
Florida status:	Native
Size:	Mature larva: about an inch
Young:	Egg, caterpillar, pupa, moth

RESPECT THE DANGER

Look without touching. Watch leaves and branches before brushing past them. Tell an adult immediately after contact and avoid rubbing the area.


ECOSCAPE KIDS
BULL SHARK
Carcharhinus leucas
POWER BENEATH THE SURFACE
DANGER
POWERFUL PREDATOR
A large shark's bite causes serious injury. Bites remain uncommon.
CHOOSE SAFER WATER
Swim with an adult and group near lifeguards.
AVOID FEEDING ACTIVITY
Stay away from fishing, baitfish schools and murky water.
FOLLOW WARNINGS
Obey closures. Avoid swimming in low light.
Illustrations are not to scale

ECOSCAPE KIDS

BULL SHARK

Carcharhinus leucas

BUILT TO SURVIVE

SALT-BALANCE SPECIALIST
Its body adjusts salt and water handling in fresh and salt water.

ELECTRICAL CLUES
Special sensory organs detect weak electrical fields from nearby animals.

A CARTILAGE SKELETON
Sharks have flexible cartilage rather than a skeleton mainly made of bone.

TEETH IN RESERVE
Rows of developing teeth replace teeth lost during feeding.

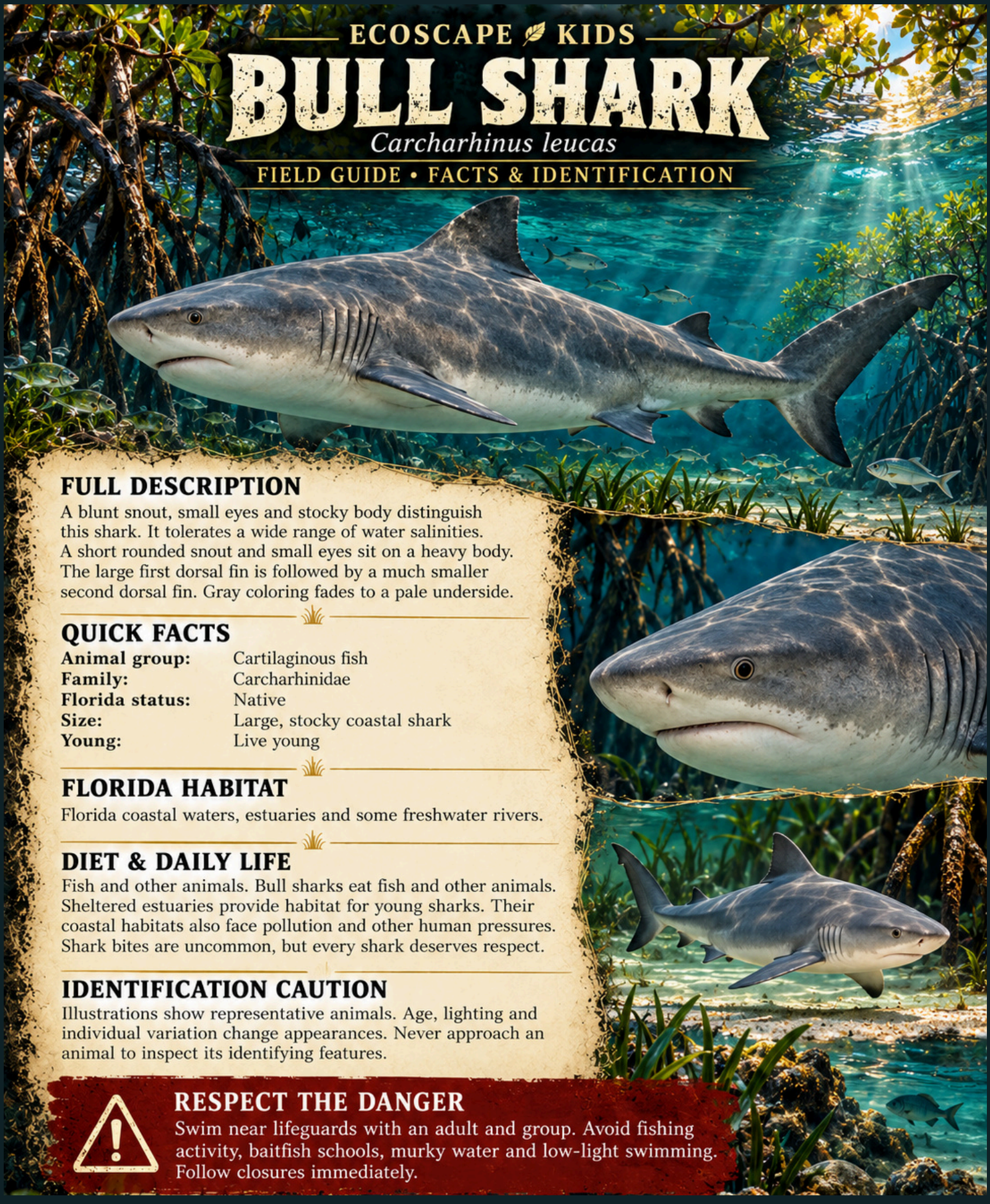
POWERFUL MOVEMENT
The tail supplies thrust while paired fins help control position.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

BULL SHARK

Carcharhinus leucas

FIELD GUIDE • FACTS & IDENTIFICATION



FULL DESCRIPTION

A blunt snout, small eyes and stocky body distinguish this shark. It tolerates a wide range of water salinities. A short rounded snout and small eyes sit on a heavy body. The large first dorsal fin is followed by a much smaller second dorsal fin. Gray coloring fades to a pale underside.

QUICK FACTS

Animal group:	Cartilaginous fish
Family:	Carcharhinidae
Florida status:	Native
Size:	Large, stocky coastal shark
Young:	Live young

FLORIDA HABITAT

Florida coastal waters, estuaries and some freshwater rivers.

DIET & DAILY LIFE

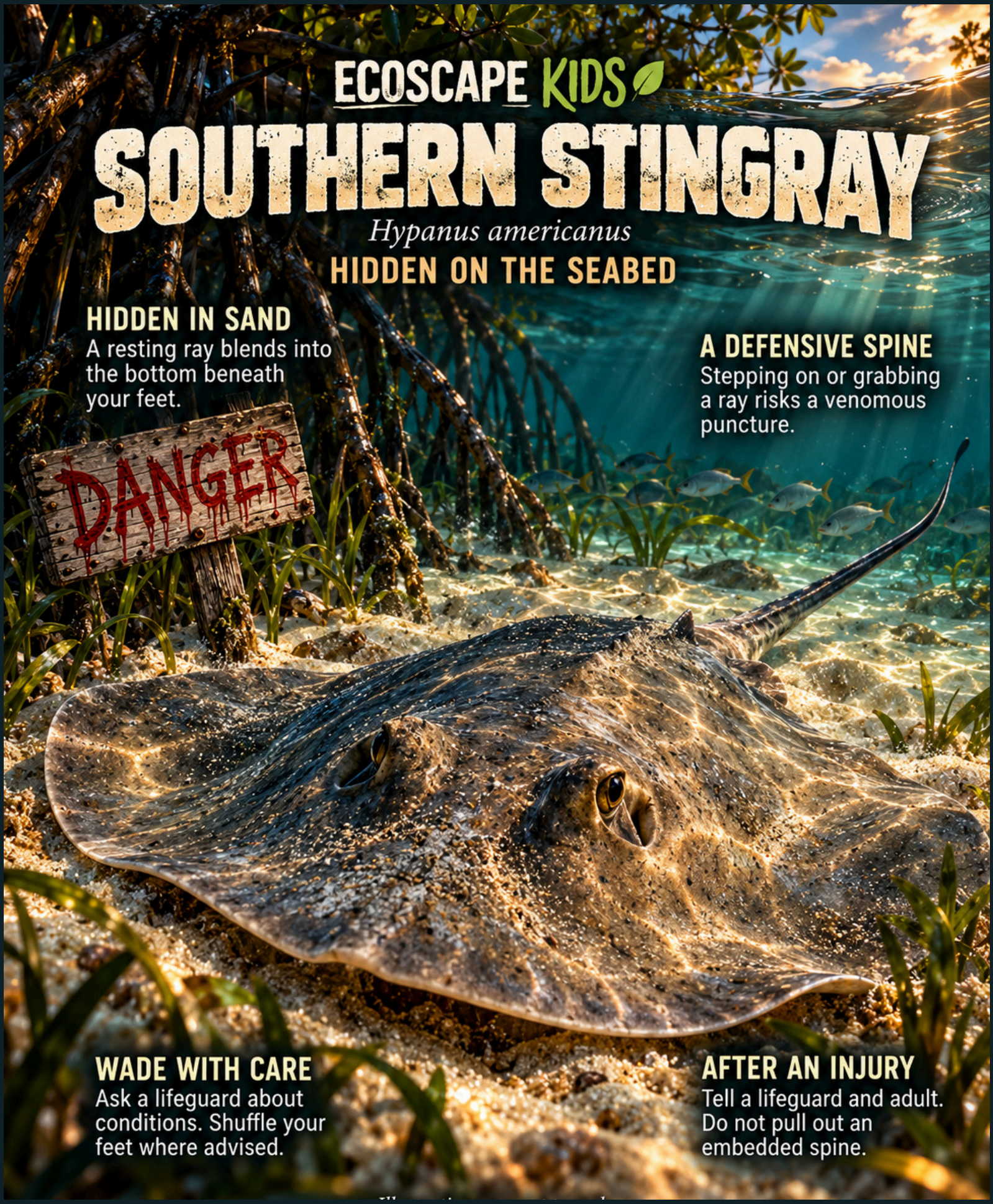
Fish and other animals. Bull sharks eat fish and other animals. Sheltered estuaries provide habitat for young sharks. Their coastal habitats also face pollution and other human pressures. Shark bites are uncommon, but every shark deserves respect.

IDENTIFICATION CAUTION

Illustrations show representative animals. Age, lighting and individual variation change appearances. Never approach an animal to inspect its identifying features.

RESPECT THE DANGER

Swim near lifeguards with an adult and group. Avoid fishing activity, baitfish schools, murky water and low-light swimming. Follow closures immediately.

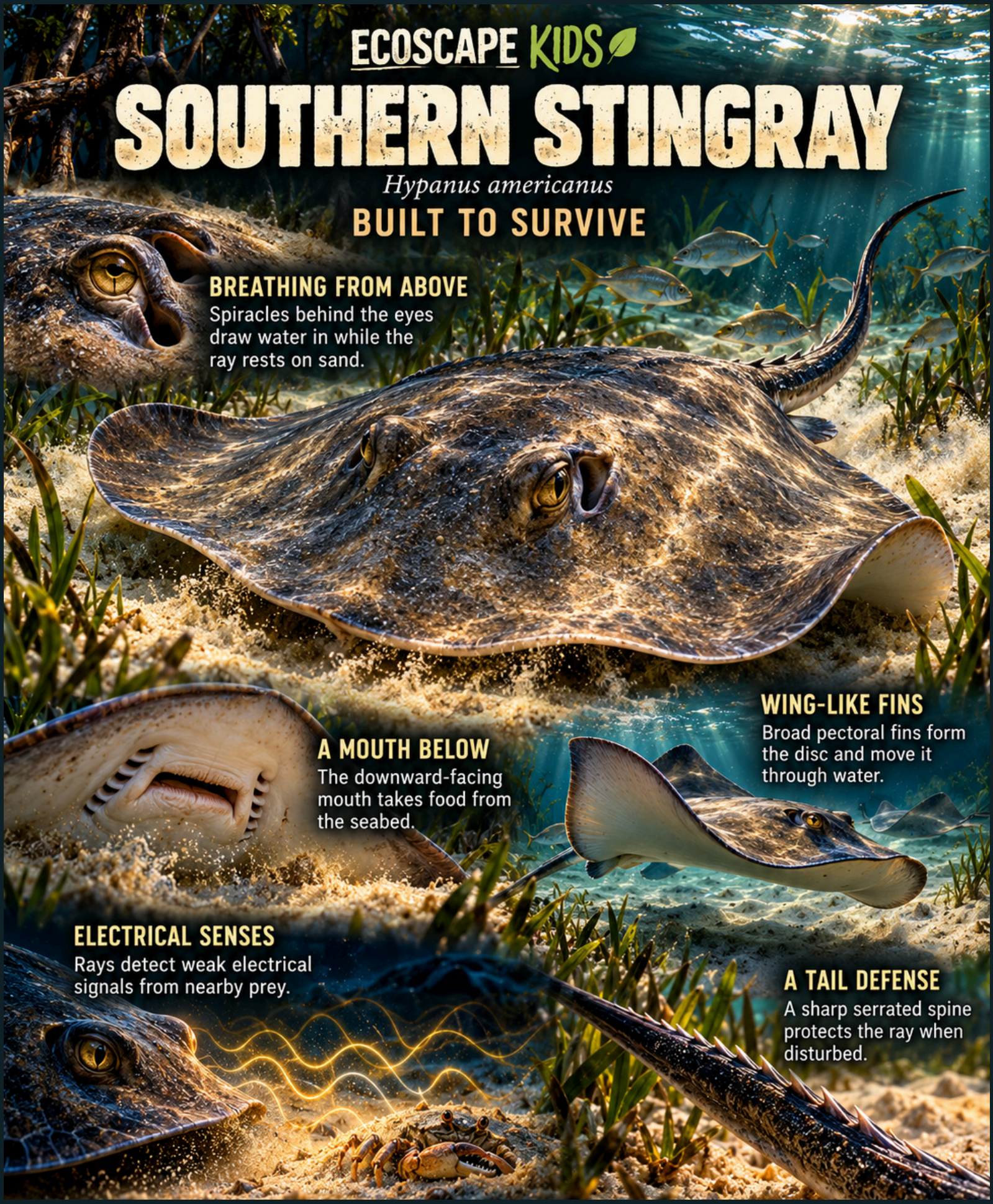

ECOSCAPE KIDS
SOUTHERN STINGRAY
Hypanus americanus
HIDDEN ON THE SEABED
HIDDEN IN SAND
A resting ray blends into the bottom beneath your feet.
A DEFENSIVE SPINE
Stepping on or grabbing a ray risks a venomous puncture.
DANGER
WADE WITH CARE
Ask a lifeguard about conditions. Shuffle your feet where advised.
AFTER AN INJURY
Tell a lifeguard and adult. Do not pull out an embedded spine.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

SOUTHERN STINGRAY

Hypanus americanus

BUILT TO SURVIVE



BREATHING FROM ABOVE
Spiracles behind the eyes draw water in while the ray rests on sand.

A MOUTH BELOW
The downward-facing mouth takes food from the seabed.

WING-LIKE FINS
Broad pectoral fins form the disc and move it through water.

ELECTRICAL SENSES
Rays detect weak electrical signals from nearby prey.

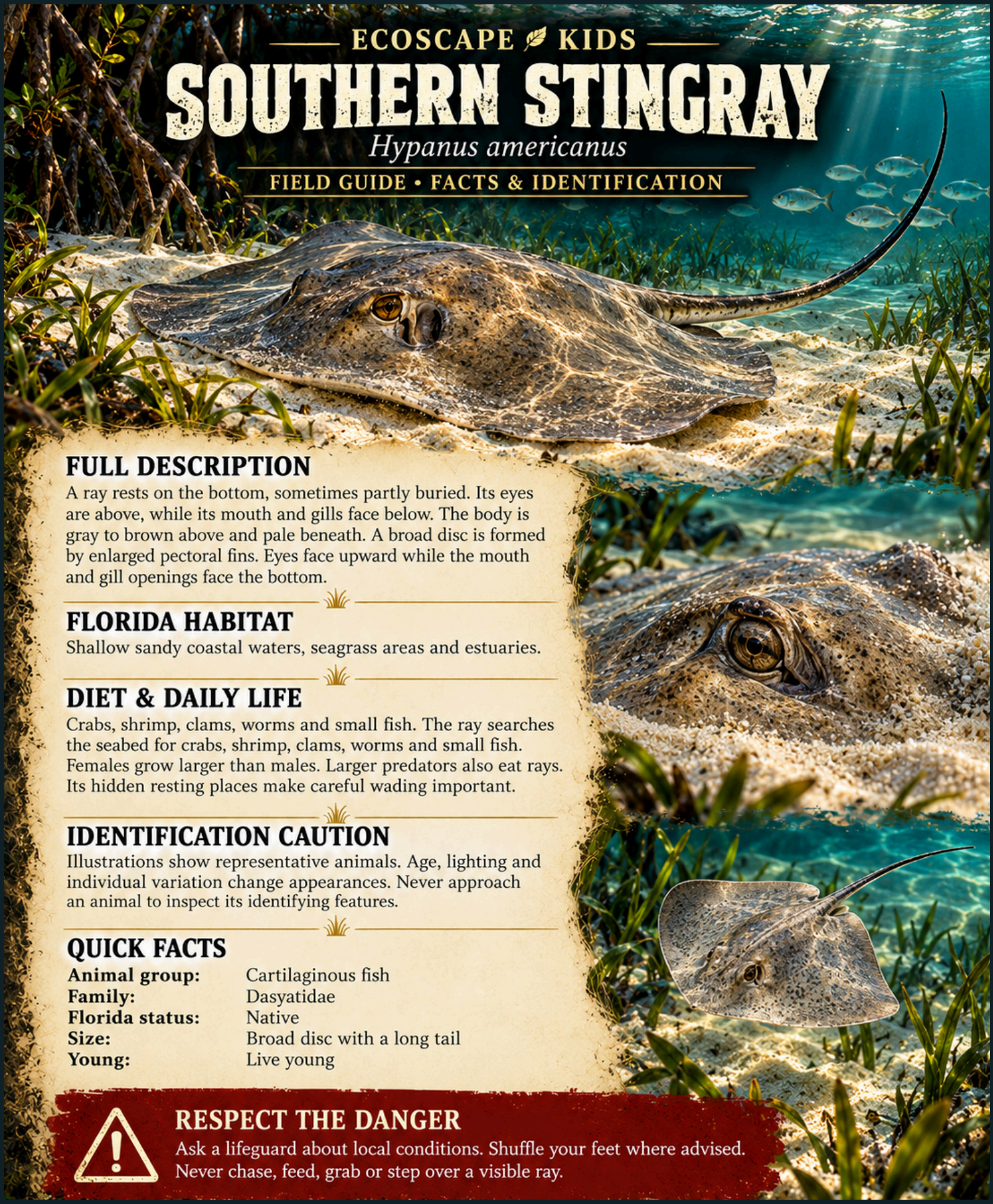
A TAIL DEFENSE
A sharp serrated spine protects the ray when disturbed.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

SOUTHERN STINGRAY

Hypanus americanus

FIELD GUIDE • FACTS & IDENTIFICATION



FULL DESCRIPTION

A ray rests on the bottom, sometimes partly buried. Its eyes are above, while its mouth and gills face below. The body is gray to brown above and pale beneath. A broad disc is formed by enlarged pectoral fins. Eyes face upward while the mouth and gill openings face the bottom.

FLORIDA HABITAT

Shallow sandy coastal waters, seagrass areas and estuaries.

DIET & DAILY LIFE

Crabs, shrimp, clams, worms and small fish. The ray searches the seabed for crabs, shrimp, clams, worms and small fish. Females grow larger than males. Larger predators also eat rays. Its hidden resting places make careful wading important.

IDENTIFICATION CAUTION

Illustrations show representative animals. Age, lighting and individual variation change appearances. Never approach an animal to inspect its identifying features.

QUICK FACTS

Animal group:	Cartilaginous fish
Family:	Dasyatidae
Florida status:	Native
Size:	Broad disc with a long tail
Young:	Live young

RESPECT THE DANGER

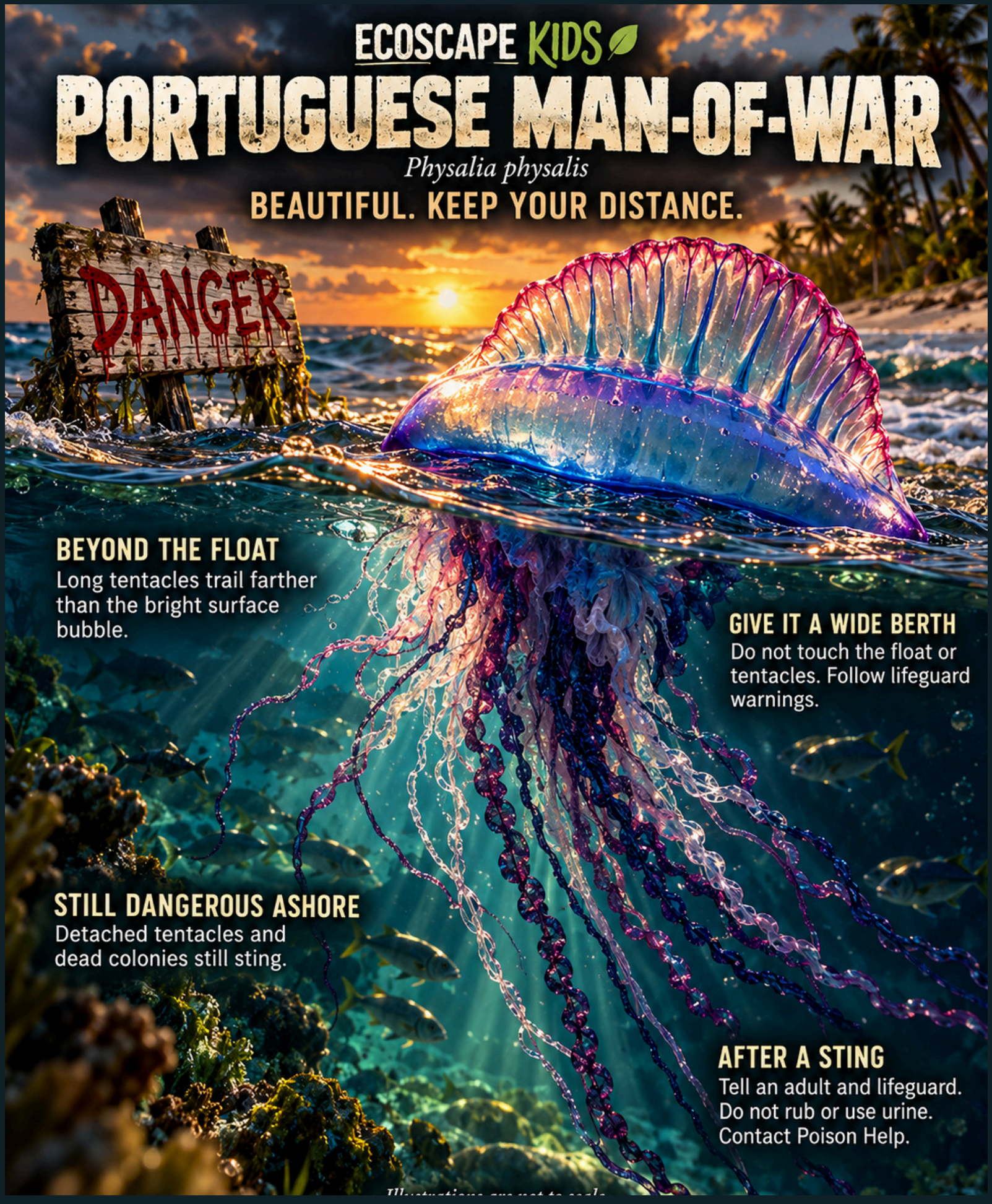
Ask a lifeguard about local conditions. Shuffle your feet where advised. Never chase, feed, grab or step over a visible ray.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

PORTUGUESE MAN-OF-WAR

Physalia physalis

BEAUTIFUL. KEEP YOUR DISTANCE.



BEYOND THE FLOAT
Long tentacles trail farther than the bright surface bubble.

GIVE IT A WIDE BERTH
Do not touch the float or tentacles. Follow lifeguard warnings.

STILL DANGEROUS ASHORE
Detached tentacles and dead colonies still sting.

AFTER A STING
Tell an adult and lifeguard.
Do not rub or use urine.
Contact Poison Help.

Illustrations are not to scale

ECOSCAPE KIDS

PORTUGUESE MAN-OF-WAR

Physalia physalis

BUILT TO SURVIVE



WIND-DRIVEN TRAVEL
The gas-filled float moves with winds and ocean currents.

ONE COLONY, SHARED WORK
Connected zooids specialize in different tasks.

MICROSCOPIC STINGING CAPSULES
Nematocysts discharge tiny venom-delivering structures on contact.

NO BRAIN NEEDED
Stinging is a reflex. A detached tentacle still poses a hazard.

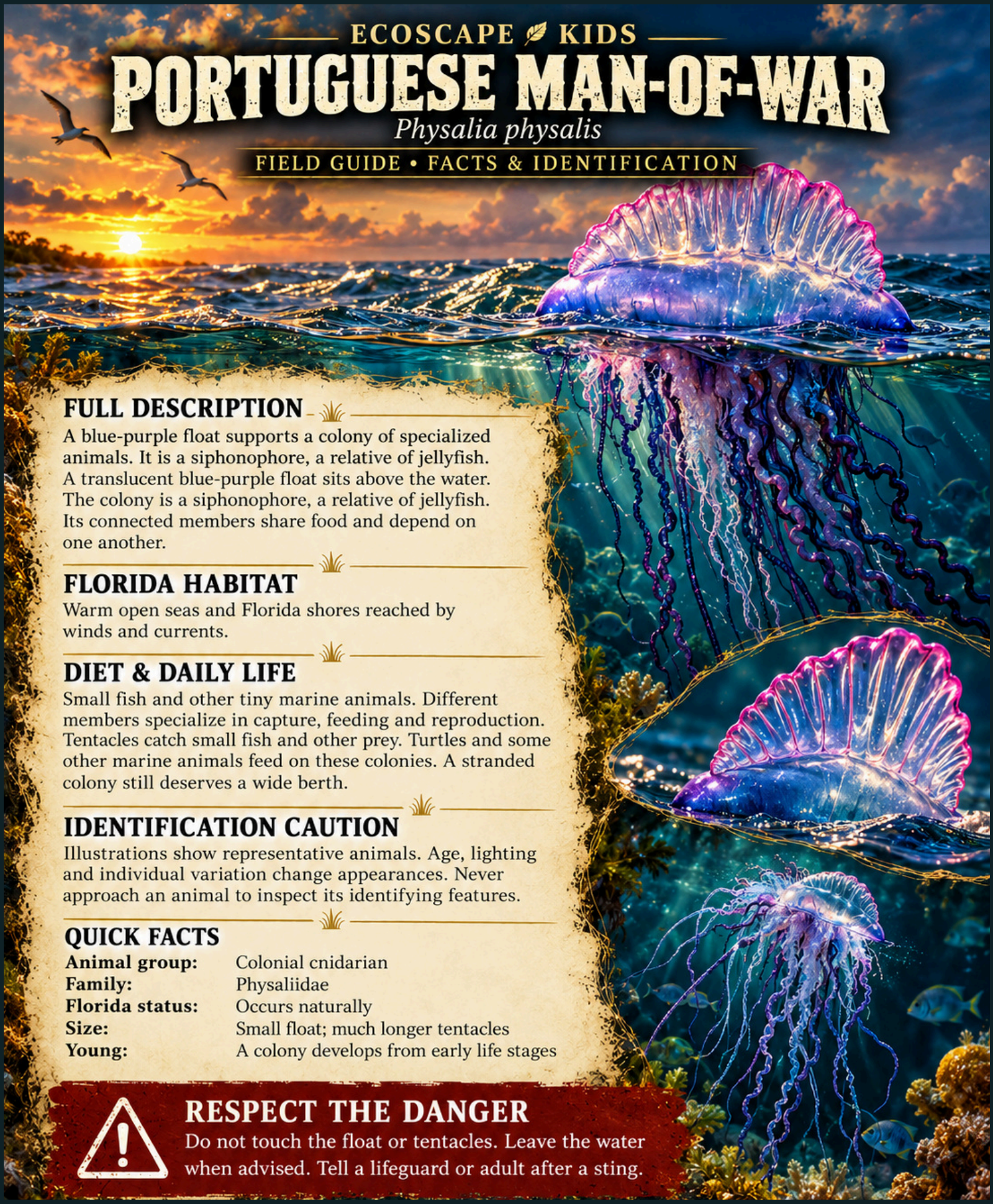
CAPTURE AND FEED
Long tentacles catch prey. Other members of the colony digest food.

ECOSCAPE KIDS

PORTUGUESE MAN-OF-WAR

Physalia physalis

FIELD GUIDE • FACTS & IDENTIFICATION



FULL DESCRIPTION

A blue-purple float supports a colony of specialized animals. It is a siphonophore, a relative of jellyfish. A translucent blue-purple float sits above the water. The colony is a siphonophore, a relative of jellyfish. Its connected members share food and depend on one another.

FLORIDA HABITAT

Warm open seas and Florida shores reached by winds and currents.

DIET & DAILY LIFE

Small fish and other tiny marine animals. Different members specialize in capture, feeding and reproduction. Tentacles catch small fish and other prey. Turtles and some other marine animals feed on these colonies. A stranded colony still deserves a wide berth.

IDENTIFICATION CAUTION

Illustrations show representative animals. Age, lighting and individual variation change appearances. Never approach an animal to inspect its identifying features.

QUICK FACTS

Animal group:	Colonial cnidarian
Family:	Physaliidae
Florida status:	Occurs naturally
Size:	Small float; much longer tentacles
Young:	A colony develops from early life stages

RESPECT THE DANGER

Do not touch the float or tentacles. Leave the water when advised. Tell a lifeguard or adult after a sting.

Animal Index

Find every animal and its three-page profile.

American Alligator 1-3
Alligator mississippiensis

Bull Shark 28-30
Carcharhinus leucas

Dusky Pygmy Rattlesnake 13-15
Sistrurus miliarius barbouri

Eastern Coral Snake 10-12
Micrurus fulvius

Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake 4-6
Crotalus adamanteus

Eastern Yellowjacket 22-24
Vespula maculifrons

Florida Cottonmouth 7-9
Agkistrodon conanti

Portuguese Man-of-War 34-36
Physalia physalis

Puss Caterpillar 25-27
Megalopyge opercularis

Red Imported Fire Ant 19-21
Solenopsis invicta

Southern Black Widow 16-18
Latrodectus mactans

Southern Stingray 31-33
Hypanus americanus

Page numbers refer to the printed numbers on the animal pages.

Each profile: encounter and safety / illustrated science / detailed field guide.

Topics & Sources

Primary sources for further learning with an adult.

Camouflage	4-6, 7-9, 13-15	**Colonies and nest defense**	19-24
Electric senses	29, 32	**Fangs and venom**	4-18
Heat sensing	5, 8, 14	**Hidden spines**	25-27, 31-33
Identifying features	Every third profile page	**Marine habitats**	28-36
Metamorphosis	20-21, 23-24, 26-27	**Safe encounters**	Every first profile page
Silk and spider senses	17-18	**Stinging capsules**	35-36

SPECIES SOURCES

American Alligator
myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/profiles/reptiles/alligator/

Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake
floridamuseum.ufl.edu/florida-snake-id/snake/eastern-diamond-backed-rattlesnake/

Florida Cottonmouth
floridamuseum.ufl.edu/florida-snake-id/snake/florida-cottonmouth/

Eastern Coral Snake
floridamuseum.ufl.edu/florida-snake-id/snake/harlequin-coralsnake/

Dusky Pygmy Rattlesnake
floridamuseum.ufl.edu/florida-snake-id/snake/dusky-pygmy-rattlesnake/

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ask.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN1000

Red Imported Fire Ant
ask.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN352

Eastern Yellowjacket
ask.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN238

Puss Caterpillar
ask.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN976

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floridamuseum.ufl.edu/discover-fish/species-profiles/bull-shark/

Southern Stingray
floridamuseum.ufl.edu/discover-fish/species-profiles/southern-stingray/

Portuguese Man-of-War
oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/portuguese-man-o-war.html

SAFETY REFERENCES

CDC: Snakebite prevention and response

Florida Poison Help: Bites and stings

Florida Museum: Shark safety

Source links reviewed October 2026. Source organizations do not endorse this book.