



Snake Time

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Rick Gush

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I suppose that some of them come out of the forests that surround us here when the hills start drying out.

Others seem to consider June the month for love, and they become more interested in romance and less interested in hiding themselves.

We don't have too many poisonous snakes here in Rapallo. I've been hiking around in the woods here for eight years now, and I've never even seen one, as hard as I might be trying.

The poisonous snakes, called "viperi" are short, triangle-headed snakes. Some of them have horns on their snout, like the dangerous *Vipera ammodytes*. I've heard of a few local sightings, but the viperi in general stay on the other side of the coastal mountains.

But we do have a bunch of other, non-poisonous snakes here. Most of them are called "bisce" (bee-she).

The first photo was taken in the creek in front of our house. I think this is a *Natrix tessellate*, known as a river snake that eats rats and frogs. This one was really big, and I estimated it as over six feet long. The head was huge, and sort of triangular in shape.

Once I spotted it lounging on the bank, I scampered back to the house to get my camera and my snake identification guide. Once I determined it wasn't poisonous, I got close and took some nice pictures before he ducked into the water and swam to the other side. Another magnificent beast.

The second photo was taken by my friend Louis Salmone in his garden. These two snakes are, I think, *Coluber viridiflavus*. These are the second most common snakes around here, and I see this species frequently.

They eat mice and the common lucertole lizards. These two exhibitionists are about three feet long, but some of the *Coluber* species grow even longer, sometimes up to seven feet!

The most commonly seen snakes here are the orbettini, the little legless lizards that look like snakes.

Known as glass snakes, they are *Anguis fragilis*. I probably rescue one of these fellows at least once a month, as they seem to end up on the steps to my office frequently. Unfortunately, the street is frequently spotted with the flattened corpses of these little guys.

The most exciting road kill I ever found here was the huge chartreuse lizard I found once. Even flat I could see that it was about three feet long including the tail. The head was a bright blue and the belly was chrome yellow. This spectacular lizard, *Lacerta lepida* is the largest lizard in Europe, and looks like a slimmer iguana. I've seen live specimens of the cousin Ramaro (copperhead), *Lacerta viridis* in the woods a few times. Pretty exciting for me.

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