

Letter:

Newspaper shouldn't promote Rattlesnake Rodeo

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I'm disappointed that the Andalusia Star-News continues to promote the Opp Rattlesnake Rodeo without any discussion of the harms caused by the capture and mistreatment of these native snakes.

The targeted eastern diamondback rattlesnake poses a very small public-safety risk. Most snake bites occur when humans try to handle or kill snakes — so the rodeo endangers public health by encouraging people to do just that.

Still, killings by humans are contributing to the snake's decline, along with agricultural and urban development. Only about 3 percent of the snake's longleaf pine habitat remains across the Southeast. That's why the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found in 2012 that the snake may qualify for protection under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Opp hosts one of two remaining rattlesnake rodeos in the Southeast. Claxton, Georgia received a boost in attendance when it recently replaced its lethal event with a wildlife festival, which displays captive rattlesnakes, along with educational wildlife exhibits.

As the avid response to Claxton's wildlife festival demonstrates, the majority of people have no interest in "snake races" or any other persecution of the state's wildlife. They simply want the privilege of seeing — and learning about — these increasingly rare representatives of our wild natural heritage in an environment that's safe for humans, and for the snakes.

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