



Round pits on either side of a rattlesnake's face sense the heat of nearby prey.

Letting Snakes BE SNAKES

When Matt Goode sees a viper, he never gets rattled.

By Lisa Harris

It's 7:00 P.M. Matt Goode throws equipment into his pickup truck and heads to a golf course.

He isn't going to play golf—far from it. The University of Arizona scientist will spend the night following rattlesnakes to find out what they do after the sun sets. With a headlamp strapped to his forehead, Goode searches for tiger rattlesnakes in grassy fairways and thick patches of prickly pear cacti.

He has outfitted many of the

reptiles with tiny radio transmitters, so he also carries an antenna to pick up their signals.

Beep. Beep. Beep.

That's CRTI-117's signal.

Tracking Snake CRTI-117

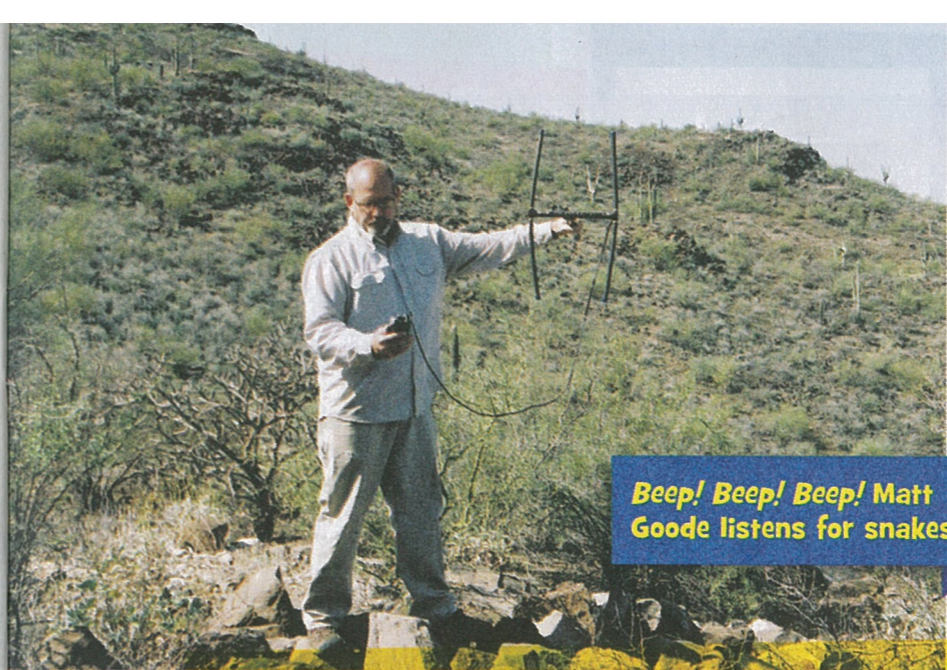
Goode's headlamp lights up the orange-and-brown-striped tail of the male tiger rattlesnake as it disappears into desert underbrush. Goode has tracked this snake for 10 years. He follows standard scientific practice when

naming snakes. *CRTI* stands for the first two letters of each word of the snake's scientific name, *Crotalus tigris*. The 117 means the reptile was the 117th tiger rattlesnake Goode outfitted. He has discovered more than 1,000 rattlesnakes since then.

As he peers around a clump of prickly pear cactus, Goode is careful not to lean into its two-inch-long spines. He spots CRTI-117. Its black tongue flicks in and out, testing the air.

Goode studies rattlesnakes that live close to people. He wants to know how they survive. What do they eat? How long do they live? How many babies do they have? And the biggest question of all: how can a creature that is feared survive around people who want to kill or remove it?

"I always thought snakes were cool," Goode says, "but I wasn't obsessed with them as a kid." As he was growing up in Wyoming,



Beep! Beep! Beep! Matt Goode listens for snakes.

That Flicking Tongue

While taking care of a professor's snakes, a young Matt Goode couldn't help but marvel at those flicking tongues. "I became interested in how snakes perceive their environment through chemical receptors at the back of their mouths. That's why they flick their tongues. They read what's going on by tasting airborne molecules."

he and his friends investigated local towns, forests, and streams. "There wasn't a pond around that I hadn't fished, jumped in, or caught a frog at," he recalls.

Part-Time Job, with Snakes

After high school, Goode planned to become a teacher, not a snake scientist. He went to the University of Wyoming and majored in English and biology.

To earn money, he took care of a professor's collection of rattlesnakes. "I fed them mice and cleaned their cages," he says. "I spent a lot of time watching them and started thinking what it was like being a snake. That's when I became a scientist. I wanted to know why they do the things they do."

One of the things Goode

learned is that rattlesnakes aren't ferocious. "Rattlesnakes are huge bluffers," he says. "They're really shy. They bite humans only if they feel threatened. They don't want to waste venom on something they can't eat. They rattle their tails to say 'Leave me alone.'"

"Rattlesnakes are huge bluffers. They're really shy."

When Goode is tracking snakes, he has to stand almost on top of them to understand what they do, so he's careful where he puts his feet. Keeping his light on CRTI-117, he goes around a spiny cactus and follows the snake as it slithers onto a putting green.

Goode has learned that for a snake, living next to a golf course has its pluses and minuses. Because the grass is watered, the nearby plants produce more fruits and seeds, which in turn means more food for rodents, the rattlesnake's favorite meal.

So snakes that live on golf courses are bigger and produce more offspring than natural desert-dwelling snakes do. But, Goode explains, golf-course snakes are exposed to people and have a higher death rate than desert-dwelling snakes.

Goode wants to find out if the snakes are reproducing faster than they are dying. "I won't know for a while since snakes can live up to 30 years," he says.

Leaving Snakes Alone

He and his students study snakes being snakes. They do not interact with their subjects, except for the first time they find them. At that point, they catch the snakes, insert a radio transmitter under the skin, and release them. Between April and October, when snakes are active, Goode and his students track the snakes every other night.

They've learned that snakes are creatures of habit. "They live in the same place their entire life, just like some people do, and go to the same place to hibernate," he says. "Sometimes they go to the exact same bush to shed their skin, year after year."

He follows CRTI-117 onto the fairway. The snake slows. Its tongue flicks faster. Past the green, under a bush, is a pocket mouse nibbling a seed.

Goode stops and holds his breath, letting CRTI-117 be CRTI-117. **4**

October

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Dear Highlights,

I want to do something for the town talent show with my friends, but I don't know what to do. Can you help?

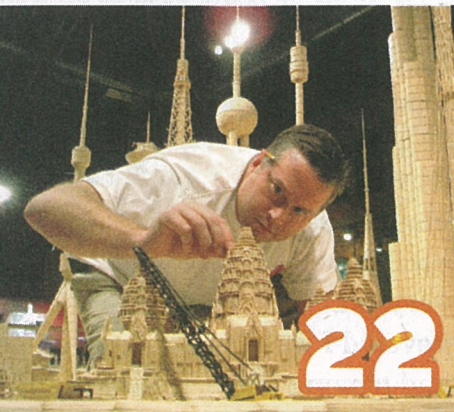
—Brynn, Connecticut

How fun! Talk to your friends first. Can you sing, dance, or play instruments? Can you perform magic tricks or a funny comedy routine? Decide on an idea, then practice. Also, check out "Paws and Think" on page 28. We hope these tips help, Brynn!



Share a Smile!

October 2 is World Smile Day.



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"Nicce Ssswing!"

For some tiger rattlesnakes, home is a golf course in Arizona.

6 BrainPlay

Why were you given the name you have?

7 Scarecrow's Restaurant

Someone isn't doing his job.

8 The Picante King

Only one dragon will take home the crown.



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... what to wear for Halloween!

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Grandfather wants Phoebe to love Greece.

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Prairie dogs, itchiness, and the "fear nothing" dinosaur.

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Stan Munro loves his job.

25 Jokes

Get ready to howl with laughter.



Caitlin Jackson, Age 6
Washington

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Devin has tough competition in the cross-country race.

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Amaze your friends.

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See more creative work from kids like Caitlin!

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Matt Goode tracks rattlers.

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It's not every day that you see a moose.



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Arizona's friends love the band Purple Shore—but Arizona doesn't.

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Corn maze fun!

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