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RattlEd: Improving Perceptions of Rattlesnakes in Elementary Classrooms

Rattlesnakes are widespread throughout the western United States, where urban expansion may lead to an increase in encounters with people. Fear, exacerbated by sensational media portrayals, is linked with the persecution of snakes. In 2024, Project RattleCam launched the first 24/7 livestream of a wild Prairie Rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*) rookery (nursery) to improve public understanding and attitudes toward snakes while engaging them in community science. To extend Project RattleCam's mission to younger audiences, we led a team of undergraduate students in developing a science curriculum for third through fifth graders, called RattlEd. Our eight-day curriculum aligns with Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), engaging students in activities such as practicing the scientific method, creating models, playing games, and engineering wildlife crossings. In 2025, teachers in New Mexico, California, Colorado, Utah, and Oregon taught RattlEd in their classrooms and surveyed students before and after the unit. Because children's attitudes are complex, we used a combination of drawing and writing prompts alongside survey questions to assess students' perceptions. Preliminary results from students in California showed decreased negativity and fear toward rattlesnakes following the unit, while their disgust remained low throughout. Students' drawings shifted from mostly depicting snakes as predators towards depictions of social and thermoregulatory behavior following the unit. All RattlEd teaching materials are available at RattleCam.org. Nature-based livestreams offer an emerging tool for fostering curiosity and empathy for wildlife. We aim to collaborate with educators in Arizona to expand the impact of RattlEd and related snake outreach initiatives.

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