The LaFayette Rotary Club held its weekly meeting on Tuesday, February 20, 2024. Rotarian Lewis Lowe, pictured on the left, was responsible for providing a program. He invited as his speaker Dennis Pinkard, pictured on the right, who, among other accomplishments, is a Master Gardener. Dennis was accompanied by his wife, Jean Ellis, and presented a program to us on Snake Awareness. His PowerPoint presentation was part of a collaboration with Birkhead and Thompson, Auburn University, Department of Biological Sciences.

Dennis explained that Alabama is a very bio-diverse environment, which promotes a wide variety of habitats and wildlife. We learned that there are 42 species of snakes in Alabama, six of which are venomous. Of the six venomous snakes, three are common in our state, the copperhead, the timber rattlesnake, and the cottonmouth. The timber rattlesnake loves cicadas and will climb trees for them. The timber rattlesnake loves our pine forests. The cottonmouth has a Zoro or Lone Ranger mask on its face. Some of the more common nonvenomous snakes in Alabama are the scarlet snake, the black racer, the ringneck snake, the speckled kingsnake (which will eat venomous snakes) and the gray rat snake (which is the best climber).

While not everyone is a snake lover, snakes do provide benefit to us, such as eating mice and squirrels. Among the snake's chief enemies are cats and snake-hating people. The best defense against snakes is to prevent them from entering your yard, by keeping your yard clean and uncluttered. Piles of wood or other objects provide good hiding places for snakes. Ortho does make a product that is effective at repelling snakes. The use of mothballs or sulfur to block snakes is common myths that has proven not to be effective.

Other myths that he dispelled were:

Venomous and nonvenomous snakes swim differently.

Snakes will chase you (they are really just trying to get to a safe place)

Snakes dig holes and occupy burrows.

Snakes hibernate (they come out to drink water).

When trying to distinguish between a venomous and nonvenomous snake, Dennis did inform us of some distinguishing characteristics.

Venomous snakes typically have a heavy body (does not apply to the coral snake)

Venomous snakes typically have many small scales on their head (does not apply to the coral snake)

Venomous snakes typically have a vertical pupil, nonvenomous snakes have round eyes.

Pit vipers have pits along the side of their head, used to detect warmth.

Nonvenomous snakes triangulate their heads to mimic a venomous snake.

Diane Sherriff