



# African Snakebite Institute

E-Mail: [johan@africansnakebiteinstitute.com](mailto:johan@africansnakebiteinstitute.com)

Tel. +27(0)824942039

Fax +27(0)86 525-2559

[www.africansnakebiteinstitute.com](http://www.africansnakebiteinstitute.com)

Skype Bugudada

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## REPTILE NEWS

Hi All

### Snakes and Myths

Snakes have a long history of bad press going back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and, of course, the Egyptian Cobra that killed Cleopatra. And the Bible has a bit about the evil snake that should have its head crushed. In more recent times it seems that newspapers, trashy magazines (can I called Huisgenoot trashy?) and the internet are doing far more damage. A large part of it is ignorance, or more politely a lack of knowledge but people just seem to love sensational stories and easily believe anything they read on the internet.



AngloAmerican

**DISHABA MINE**

**PLATINUM**

## SAFETY FLASH



### DESCRIPTION OF WHAT HAPPENED!

Python Swallows a man in the Limpopo, this is a warning for those of you who like wandering about in the bush or unexplored routes and roads from the shaft. It took 8 men to load this python on the truck. It swallowed a man after it found him drunk and sleeping next to the R510 road in Northam, Limpopo on Saturday. Had it not been spotted, the python would have remained on the same spot for up to 8 months while it digested every piece of the man's body. Including skull and every bone in his body.

### FACTS ESTABLISHED

- ☐ Having too much drink and end up sleeping next to the road.
- ☐ Travelling alone whilst you heard enough of drinking.
- ☐ We are surrounded by snakes / Pythons.

### LEARNINGS

- ☐ Stop walking in the bush and use designated transport.
- ☐ Use Mine transport provided to the employees to and from the shaft.
- ☐ **STOP WALKING FROM 50# and 44 # TO 2 SHAFT.**

There have been a number of hoaxes on the internet in recent times and some of them come and go over the years. The 6.5 m Black Mamba on the sidewalk, sometimes in Richards Bay, a mine in Botswana or even the Gautrain construction site is a fibreglass model of an Australian python in Australia, apparently put on the sidewalk in a high accident area to help reduce the speed of passing cars. Certainly no Black Mamba and they do not get near that long. In the literature we talk of 4.5 m Black Mambas but the longest specimen accurately measured in the past 20 years was in the region

of 3.8 m. Again I am often told of much bigger individuals but they are never actually measured.

There are more than one massive Puff Adder photographs doing the rounds on the internet, the most popular being a photograph of an American (in America) with a dead Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake suspended from a snake tong. If you look in the background you will see a can of American beer and the person holding the snake is wearing cowboy boots. It is not a particularly large snake and probably measured around 1.5 m. By using different lenses and angles one can easily change the perceived size of a snake.

The most popular hoax doing the rounds at present is a photograph of a large Reticulated Python from Asia with a pig in its stomach. The snake is on the back of a truck and the story is that it happened in South Africa (Richards Bay or various mines) and that the python swallowed a drunken person.

I also receive lots of E-mails from people that are desperate to keep snakes out of their properties. They use various chemicals, old oil, diesel or snake repellent that can be purchased from some hardware stores or even plant specific plants. Some argue that the snake repellent works as they had three snakes the previous year and none this year since using the spray. The counter argument is that there are thousands of houses that do not spray snake repellent and also do not have snakes. The bottom line is that none of the above measures keep snakes away and snake repellent, in my view, is a total waste of money. We have done various tests and it just doesn't work. Keep your property clear of building rubble, compost heaps, piles of rocks, corrugated sheets of asbestos or tin lying around or any other suitable hiding spots for snakes. In addition to shelter they also seek food – if you have an abundance of rodents or frogs that may well lure snakes into your garden.

## **Courses**

The next **KZN** Snake Awareness and Venomous Snake Handling Course takes place at DumaZulu in Hluhluwe on 29 March 2014. Please E-mail me for more details or go to my website.

The next **Gauteng** Snake Awareness and Venomous Snake Handling Course in Gauteng takes place at Heia Safari Ranch on 5 April 2014. Please E-mail me for more details or go to my website.

The next **Western Cape** Snake Awareness and Venomous Snake Handling Course takes place at Butterfly World on Saturday 12 April 2014. Please E-mail me for more details or go to my website.

A **Venomous Bites and Stings Course** takes place on 10 April 2014 at the University of Stellenbosch (see attachment). I will be doing two talks on snakes and snakebite and Dr. Gerbus Muller will be presenting on scorpion sting and spider bite.

## **Snake Bite App**

We are making very good progress with the First Aid for Snakebite App and it will hopefully be available on all cell phone platforms. It will be comprehensive with lots of photographs and affordable. Will keep you informed.

## **Snakebite First Aid Kit**

The First Aid snakebite kit is looking good and we hope to have a prototype within a month or so. An important aspect of the kit is an accredited advanced airways management course and this is now in place. Will keep you informed.

## **Dangerous Snakes A3 Posters**

I have expanded the range of the A3 Dangerous Snakes of Southern Africa posters and already have posters for Southern Africa (English, Afrikaans and German), Gauteng (English and Afrikaans), KZN (English and Afrikaans), Western Cape (English and Afrikaans) and the Northern Cape (English and Afrikaans). I hope to have the rest within weeks – Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, Free State, Limpopo, Northwest, Namibia, Swaziland, Mozambique and Botswana. You will be able to download these posters free from my website or have one mailed (R25.00 for local postage and packaging).

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## **Johan Marais**

*Author of A Complete Guide to Snakes of Southern Africa*

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