



ASI SNAKE BOOKLET

COMMON SNAKES OF HOWICK

Copyright: Johan Marais - African Snakebite Institute
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SNAKE COURSES

The ASI offers both public and corporate snake courses.

Public courses take place at various venues throughout South Africa.

The corporate training is done on-site, both in South Africa, as well as in 19 African countries.

We pride ourselves on teaching only the safest snake handling methods, to ensure the safety of both the handler and the snake.

We offer a range of different course options, including snake awareness, first aid for snakebite, venomous snake handling, venomous snake handling bootcamps, as well as advanced first aid for snakebite, advanced venomous snake handling and a reptile photography course.

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INTRODUCTION

The African Snakebite Institute is the leading training provider of Snake Awareness, First Aid for Snakebite and Venomous Snake Handling courses in Africa as well as the largest distributor of quality snake handling equipment, snake PPE and snakebite first aid kits. Our aim is to spread snake awareness as far and wide as possible, which is why we've launched our new free E-Book series.

Our CEO, Johan Marais is a well-known herpetologist with over 40 years of experience with snakes. He has worked at various reptile facilities and has collaborated on a variety of scientific studies with some of the world's leading herpetologists. He is also one of Africa's most prominent authors of snake books and has written the best-sellers *A Complete Guide to Snakes of Southern Africa*, *Snakes and Snakebite in Southern Africa* and *First Aid for Snakebite*, to mention just a few.



COMMON SNAKES OF HOWICK

Kwazulu Natal has 80 different snake species. Of the 40 snakes that occur around Howick, three are highly venomous, six are venomous, one can inflict a painful bite and the rest are mildly venomous or harmless. We've listed the common species in this booklet, showing venomosity, key ID features, full distribution, and snakebite info for venomous species.

Snakebite is problematic with most bites reported from the hot, wet regions in the eastern part of the country. More than 4,000 snakebites are reported annually with over 1,000 victims being hospitalised. Of those around 60% show signs of envenomation and the remaining 40% show no symptoms – these are referred to as dry bites or may be bites from mildly venomous or harmless snakes. In a recent 5 year survey of 879 snakebite cases in Zululand, nearly 98% of victims showed typical signs of cytotoxic envenomation – largely Mozambique Spitting Cobra, Puff Adder, Common Night Adder and Stiletto Snake bites. Despite their relative frequency, if treated correctly in hospital, these bites are rarely fatal. Most bites occurred in the early evening in the warm wet summer months from November to April/May. Around 84% of the bites were inflicted well below the knee. Less than 11% of these victims received antivenom and none of the bites in this survey were fatal.

Generally speaking we have 10 – 12 fatal snakebites a year in South Africa and these are invariably caused by the Black Mamba and Cape Cobra. Both of these snakes have a potent neurotoxic venom that may quickly affect breathing.

SNAKE HANDLING EQUIPMENT

The African Snakebite Institute is the leading provider of quality snake handling equipment in Africa. View our range online [here](http://www.AFRICANSNAKEBITEINSTITUTE.com).



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COMMON SNAKES OF HOWICK



Howick has around thirty five different types of snakes. Four species are highly venomous, while six others can inflict a rather painful bite. Seven species are considered mildly venomous. Sixteen species are harmless.

HIGHLY VENOMOUS

Has caused human fatalities

VENOMOUS

Painful bite, but does not require antivenom

MILDLY VENOMOUS

Not thought to be harmful

HARMLESS

Not dangerous to humans



Rinkhals
(*Hemachatus haemachatus*)

HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Boomslang - male
(*Dispholidus typus*)

HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Puff Adder
(*Bitis arietans*)

HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Common Night Adder
(*Causus rhombeatus*)

VENOMOUS



Short-mouthed Grass Snake
(*Psammophis brevirostris*)

MILDLY VENOMOUS



Spotted Skaapsteeker
(*Psammophylax rhombatus*)

MILDLY VENOMOUS



Spotted Harlequin
(*Homoroselaps lacteus*)

MILDLY VENOMOUS



Natal Black Snake
(*Macrelaps microlepidotus*)

VENOMOUS



Cross-marked Grass Snake
(*Psammophis crucifer*)

MILDLY VENOMOUS



Herald Snake
(*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*)

MILDLY VENOMOUS



Mole Snake
(*Pseudaspis cana*)

CAN INFLECT A NASTY BITE



Western Natal Green Snake
(*Philothamnus occidentalis*)

HARMLESS



Green Water Snake
(*Philothamnus hoplogaster*)

HARMLESS



Brown House Snake
(*Boaedon capensis*)

HARMLESS



Olive Snake
(*Lycodonomorphus inornatus*)

HARMLESS



Brown Water Snake
(*Lycodonomorphus rufulus*)

HARMLESS



Common Wolf Snake
(*Lycophilidion capense*)

HARMLESS



Southern Brown Egg-eater
(*Dasypeltis inornata*)

HARMLESS



Common Slug-eater
(*Duberia lutrix*)

HARMLESS



Bibron's Blind Snake
(*Afrotyphlops bibronii*)

HARMLESS

JOHAN MARAIS is the author of various books on reptiles including the best-seller *A Complete Guide to Snakes of Southern Africa*. He is a popular public speaker and CEO of the African Snakebite Institute. The **African Snakebite Institute (ASI)** offers a variety of courses including Snake Awareness, Scorpion Awareness and Venomous Snake Handling. ASI is accredited by the **International Society of Zoological Sciences (ISZS)** and Travel Doctor-approved service provider. The courses are also accredited by the **Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA)**. ASI is the largest provider of quality snake handling and safety equipment in Africa.

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HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Rinkhals (*Hemachatus haemachatus*)

Maximum Length:
1.5 m



Other names:

Ring-necked Spitting Cobra

The Rinkhals is endemic to Southern Africa and is found only in South Africa, eSwatini, Lesotho and eastern Zimbabwe. Though it resembles a cobra (spreads a hood) it is not a true cobra and gives birth to live young. It is essentially a grassland inhabitant but is also found in fynbos in the Western Cape. It is fond of wetlands where it feeds on frogs. When threatened it is quick to disappear down a hole, but if cornered it will stand its ground, form a hood and spit. The Rinkhals is also quick to play dead with the body turned upside down and the mouth hanging open. The venom of this snake is largely cytotoxic causing pain, swelling and potentially tissue damage. Bites are extremely rare and fatalities virtually unheard of. Polyvalent antivenom is effective.



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ASI EASY ID

Rinkhals (*Hemachatus haemachatus*)

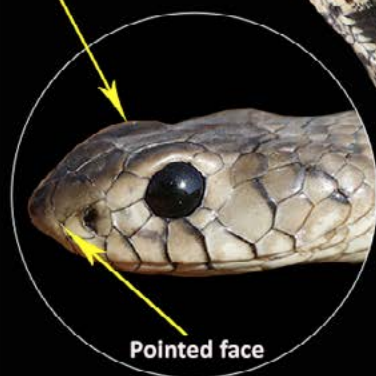
HIGHLY VENOMOUS

Average length: 80 cm - 1 m. Maximum length: 1.5 m

Can be confused with: Mozambique Spitting Cobra, Mole Snakes



Adults have black faces.
Juveniles often have
grey faces
with black edged scales



Pointed face

Can spit effectively up to 3 m

Varies in colour from olive to
dark brown, grey or dull black.
In KZN, the Eastern and Western
Cape and Zimbabwe
they are usually banded

Spreads a hood

White bars
on neck region

Has keeled scales,
giving the snake a
rough texture

Belly usually black,
sometimes with grey
or pale edges

Well known for shamming death
when harassed

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SNAKEBITE PROFILE

RINKHALS

Hemachatus haemachatus



Risk of Bites

This snake is quick to hood in a defensive position when startled and will often spit venom at attackers. It is also well known for playing dead when cornered. Bites to humans are uncommon. However, dogs that attack the snake are often bitten and die quickly unless treated with antivenom by a veterinarian soon after a bite.



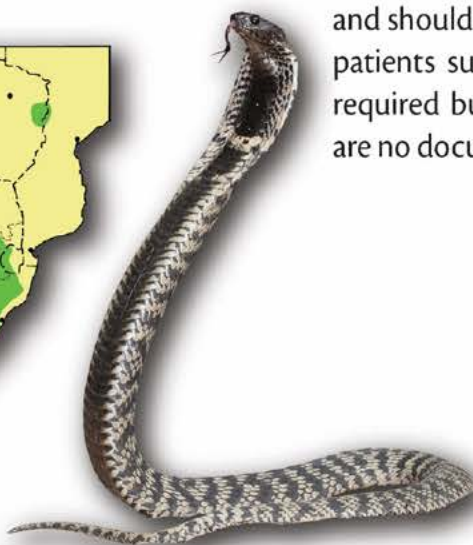
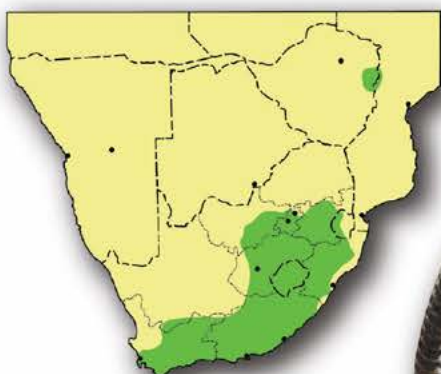
Most Bites

Bites are not common, except for incidents where snake keepers are bitten by captive snakes. Persons handling the snake may also be bitten.



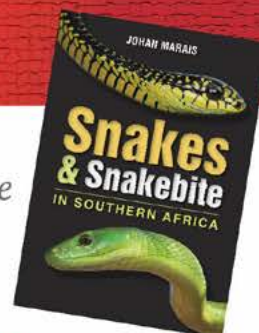
Symptoms & Venom

The venom is both cytotoxic and neurotoxic. Symptoms include painful swelling of the affected limb and possibly necrosis at the site of the bite. Other symptoms, though not common, include nausea, dizziness and respiratory distress.



See pages 67-69

– *Snakes and Snakebite
in Southern Africa*
(2024).



First Aid

Immobilise and reassure the patient. Elevate the affected limb. Promptly transport the victim to the nearest hospital that has emergency facilities. Avoid all other first aid remedies including bandages. For venom in the eyes, wash the eyes out immediately using water or any other bland liquid and transport the victim to a medical doctor.



Medical Treatment

In cases of severe envenomation where there are clear signs of progressive swelling, which extends more than 10-15cm per hour above the bite site, or respiratory distress, doctors will treat such bites with 12 ampoules (or more) of polyvalent antivenom. Anti-inflammatories (NSAID's) and antibiotics are not indicated in the short term. Fasciotomies are rarely justified and should generally be avoided. In cases where patients suffer tissue damage, surgery may be required but rarely in the first few days. There are no documented fatalities from these bites in more than 45 years.



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HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Boomslang (*Dispholidus typus*)

Maximum Length:
2.1 m



Other names:

Boomslang

The Boomslang is largely tree-living but may descend to the ground to bask. In trees it poses no threat to humans as it is extremely reluctant to bite, and bites are rare. Juveniles are grey with a massive emerald, green eye but change to the adult colours around a length of 1 m. Most males are bright green, sometimes with black between the scales, but in the Cape Provinces they are usually black above with green, yellow or orange sides. Females are usually brown to grey in colour. Boomslang venom is haemotoxic and compromises the blood clotting mechanism, causing uncontrolled bleeding if not treated. The South African Vaccine Producers manufacture a monovalent antivenom for bites from Boomslang that is very effective.



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ASI EASY ID

Boomslang (*Dispholidus typus*)

HIGHLY VENOMOUS

Average length: 1.2 m. Maximum length: 2.1 m

Often confused with: Black Mambas, Green Mambas, green snakes and sand snakes

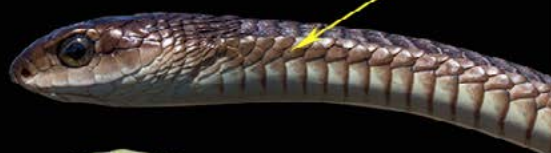


Females are normally olive grey to brown or brick red in colour



Small head with large eye

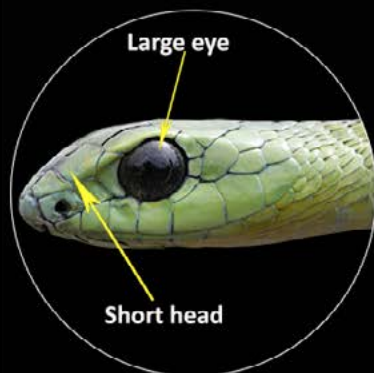
Scales are keeled giving snake a rough texture



Most males are green in colour



Males in the Cape are usually black above with yellow, green or orange sides



Large eye

Short head



Juveniles have big emerald green eyes

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SNAKEBITE PROFILE

BOOMSLANG

Dispholidus typus



Risk of Bites

Bites are not common in South Africa. This snake lives in trees and shrubs and interactions with humans are infrequent. It is a placid snake that only bites when provoked or handled. If spotted, it is quick to flee higher up into trees.



Most Bites

Bites occur when a basking snake is accidentally stepped on or grabbed, or when it is handled.

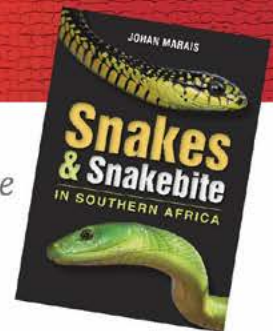


Symptoms & Venom

Drop for drop the Boomslang has the most potent venom of any snake in Africa. It is slow-acting, but potentially haemotoxic and symptoms include bleeding from the bite site, the nose, mucous membranes and internal bleeding.

See pages 79-81

– *Snakes and Snakebite in Southern Africa* (2024).



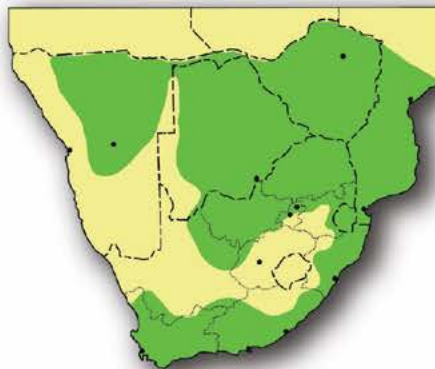
First Aid

Immobilise and reassure the patient. Elevate the affected limb. Promptly transport the victim to the nearest hospital that has emergency facilities. Avoid all other first aid remedies including bandages.



Medical Treatment

In cases of severe envenomation patients are treated with monovalent Boomslang antivenom. The initial dosage is two vials but, in some cases, a third vial may be required. This antivenom is produced by the South African Vaccine Producers. It is a Schedule 4 drug, therefore a script is required should one wish to purchase it. It comes in a 10 ml vial and must be refrigerated. It has a three year shelf life.



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HIGHLY VENOMOUS



Puff Adder

(*Bitis arietans*)

Maximum Length:
1.4 m



Other names:

Pofadder, Imbululu

The Puff Adder is widespread over much of southern Africa and further north into Africa. It is a heavy-bodied snake that relies on its excellent camouflage and is reluctant to move. Much of its life is spent in camouflage mode and recent research has shown that when hiding, the Puff Adder will not hiss or strike when approached, as this would give away its presence. It is an ambush hunter that will coil up into a striking position and await its prey. This can last several days or even weeks. Toads are lured closer with flicking of the tongue. Puff Adder venom is potently cytotoxic, causing severe pain, swelling, blistering and in many cases severe tissue damage. Polyvalent antivenom is effective.



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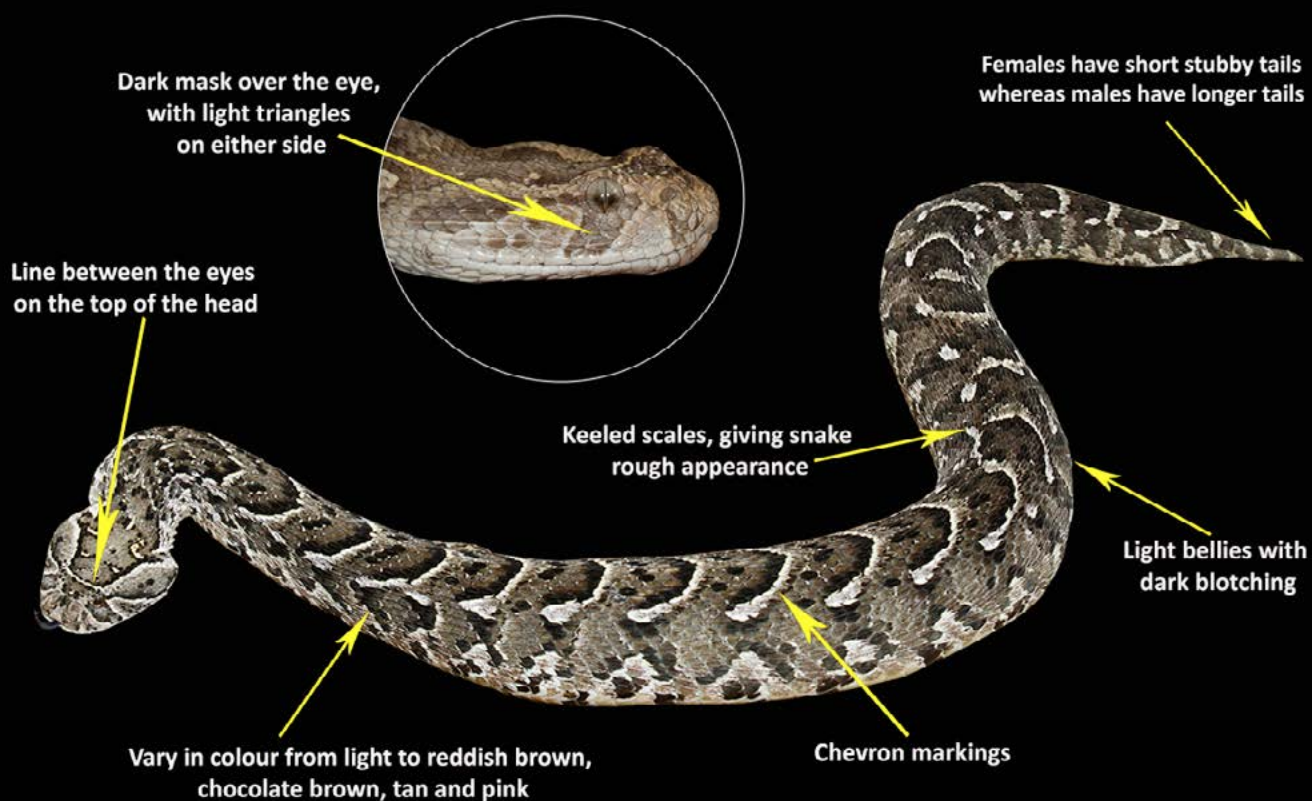
ASI EASY ID

Puff Adder (*Bitis arietans*)

HIGHLY VENOMOUS

Average length: 90 cm. Maximum length: 1.4 m

Often confused with: night adders and Berg Adders



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Snakebite Profile

Puff Adder

Bitis arietans



Risk Of Bites

Bites are common as this snake is widespread throughout most of southern Africa. Along with the Mozambique Spitting Cobra, these two snakes account for the majority of serious snakebites in southern Africa. Dogs are at risk and often get bitten when attempting to kill the snake.



Most Bites

Most victims are bitten at night when accidentally stepping on the snake, but bites are also inflicted during the day when the snake is basking. Most bites are on the feet or lower legs.

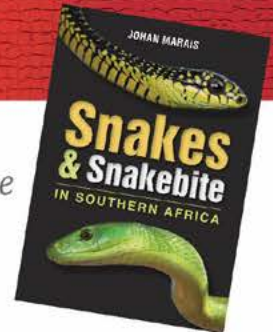


Symptoms & Venom

The venom is potently cytotoxic as well as haemotoxic. Symptoms include severe pain, progressive swelling, bleeding from the fang punctures, blistering and tissue damage. The lymph nodes may also be affected. Dogs may perish after a bite from this snake, unless treated with polyvalent antivenom, if required.



See pages 26-28
– *Snakes and Snakebite
in Southern Africa*
(2024).



First Aid

Immobilise and reassure the patient. Elevate the affected limb and remove tight clothing and jewelry. Promptly transport the victim to the nearest hospital that has emergency facilities. Avoid all other first aid remedies including bandages.



Medical Treatment

In cases of severe envenomation where there are clear signs of progressive swelling, which extends more than 10-15cm per hour above the bite site, doctors will treat such bites with 6 ampoules (or more) of polyvalent antivenom. Anti-inflammatories (NSAID's) and antibiotics are not indicated in the short term. Fasciotomies are rarely justified and should generally be avoided. In cases where patients suffer tissue damage, surgery may be required but rarely in the first few days.

Fatalities are rare.



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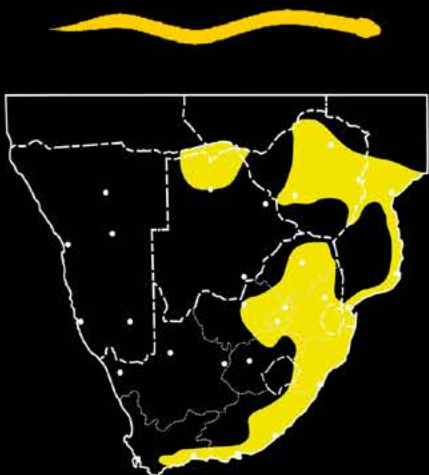


VENOMOUS



Common Night Adder (*Causus rhombeatus*)

Maximum Length:
1 m



Other names:

Rhombic Night Adder, Gewone Nagadder

Despite the common name, the Night Adder is more active during the day. It averages 30 – 60 cm in length, but can reach 1 m. It can be identified by the distinct dark V-marking on the head. It prefers damp localities and is a frog specialist. The Night Adder is generally a docile snake but will hiss aggressively and strike when provoked. It accounts for many bites, especially in KZN and the Eastern Cape. It is commonly found in suburban gardens.

Night Adder venom is cytotoxic, and most bites are not serious – causing pain and swelling. Having said that, the venom of this snake should never be underestimated, especially in children, as some victims require hospitalisation.



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ASI EASY ID

Common Night Adder (*Causus rhombeatus*)

VENOMOUS

Average length: 40 - 60 cm. Maximum length: 1 m

Often confused with: Rhombic Egg-eaters, Berg Adders and Puff Adders



Despite the common name,
they are mainly active during the day

Rhombic markings.
Dark brown, light-edged blotches
along the centre of the body and tail

Single distinct "V"
marking on the head.
The apex of the V ending
between the eyes

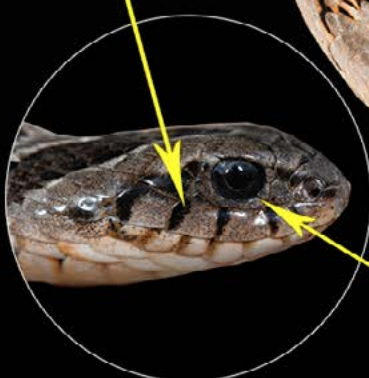
Black lines on the
edges of the scales
of the upper lip

Often has
dark mask
over eye

Belly usually white to
yellowish or light grey

Colour, varying shades
of light grey, olive,
or light to pinkish brown

Round pupil



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Snakebite Profile

COMMON NIGHT ADDER

Causus rhombeatus



Risk of Bites

Bites are quite common in coastal KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. Despite the common name, this snake is active during the day and frequents moist areas at dams, rivers and streams, where it feeds largely on toads. Dogs are at risk and often get bitten when attempting to kill the snake.



Most Bites

People are bitten when accidentally stepping onto one of these snakes. Most bites are on the feet or lower legs. Some people are under the wrong impression that Night Adder venom is mild and get bitten when handling the snake.



First Aid

Immobilise and reassure the patient, elevate the affected limb and rest it. In severe cases, especially in small children, the patient may require hospitalization for rehydration and pain.

See pages 40-41

– Snakes and Snakebite
in Southern Africa
(2024).



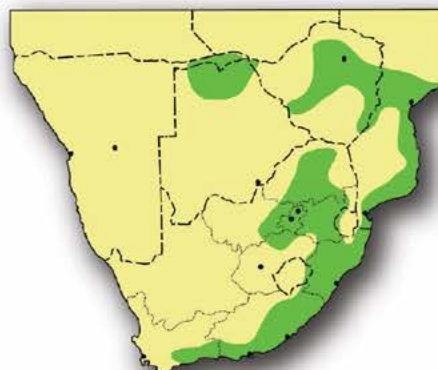
Symptoms & Venom

The venom is largely cytotoxic (cell-destroying), causing pain, local swelling, and discoloration of the bitten area within an hour or two. The lymph nodes may also be affected. Swelling and discoloration may persist for more than a week, but blistering is rare. The venom of this snake does not cause tissue damage but could be quite serious when dogs are bitten. Small dogs may perish after a bite from this snake.



Medical Treatment

There is no antivenom for this bite of a Common Night Adder. Both antibiotics and anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) are not indicated and should not be given in the first 72 hours. If well rested, patients recover fully within a week or two.



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VENOMOUS



Natal Black Snake (*Macrelaps microlepidotus*)

Maximum Length:
1.2 m



Other names:
Natal Swartslang

A secretive snake that spends most of its life underground in the cooler regions of coastal KZN and the Eastern Cape. This snake may be found under rotting logs or when doing excavations, otherwise it moves about slowly on warm, overcast days. It is also a good swimmer.

The Natal Black Snake feeds on frogs, legless lizards and small rodents and is known to take carrion. It is easily mistaken for a purple-glossed snake and differs in that it has single subcaudal scales, whereas the purple-glossed snakes have paired subcaudals. Little is known about the venom of this snake as it rarely bites. In a single case many years ago, a victim was unconscious for approximately 30 minutes after the bite.



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ASI EASY ID

Natal Black Snake (*Macrelaps microlepidotus*)

VENOMOUS

Average length: 60 - 90 cm. Maximum length: 1.2 m

Often confused with: purple-glossed snakes, stiletto snakes and wolf snakes



Distribution is important



Long, thin tail

Single subcaudal scales

Belly is black in colour

Shiny black in colour

Small black eyes

25 midbody scales

White between scales

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Snakebite Profile

NATAL BLACK SNAKE

Macrelaps microlepidotus



Risk Of Bites

This is a slow-moving snake that lives underground. It may surface on warm overcast days or be found under logs and rocks or during excavations.



Most Bites

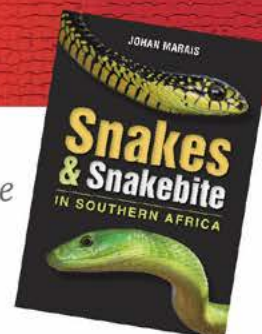
The Natal Black Snake is reluctant to bite and few bites have been recorded.



Symptoms & Venom

Very little is known about the venom of this snake. Its venom appears to be cytotoxic, causing pain and mild swelling.

See pages 88-89
– *Snakes and Snakebite
in Southern Africa*
(2024).



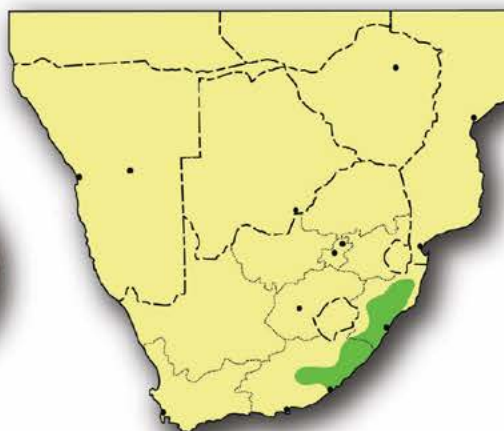
First Aid

Immobilise and reassure the patient and elevate the affected limb. Remove tight clothing and jewelry. Transport the victim to the nearest hospital or doctor for pain management. Avoid all other first aid remedies including bandages.



Medical Treatment

There is no effective antivenom that works for the bite of this snake and victims are treated symptomatically. It appears to be a relatively mild bite with minor symptoms.



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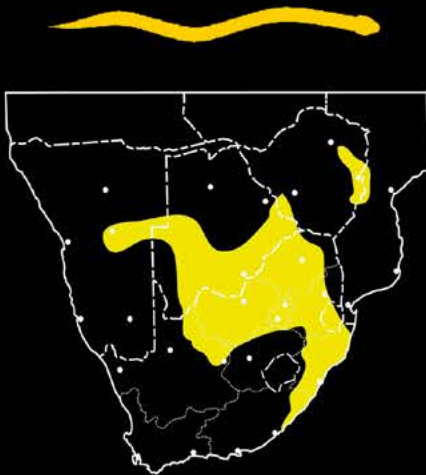


MILDLY VENOMOUS



Short-snouted Grass Snake (*Psammophis brevirostris*)

Maximum Length:
1.2 m



Other names:

Short-snouted Whip/Sand Snake, Kortsnoet Grasslang

A medium sized, fast-moving snake that is active during the day. It averages 40-60cm but may exceed a meter in length. This snake is fond of basking and very quick to escape. It may flee into low shrubs. If handled it will not hesitate to bite. Individuals captured by the tail will spin and snap a piece of tail off in order to escape. The Short-snouted Grass Snake feeds on lizards, snakes and small rodents. It is a common snake in Gauteng and occurs throughout most of the central part of southern Africa and as far south as the Eastern Cape. Also found in Limpopo, North West and elsewhere further north. The venom of this snake is mild and poses no threat to humans.



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ASI EASY ID

Short-snouted Grass Snake (*Psammophis brevirostris*)

MILDLY VENOMOUS

Average length: 60 cm. Maximum length: 1.2 m

Often confused with: Olive Grass Snakes, Female Boomslang



Distribution is important

Sandy brown in colour, often
with darker broad band running
down center of back

Often has patterns on the
first third of the body

Often has lighter
vertebral stitching
down spine

Orange iris

Belly usually off-white
to yellow in colour

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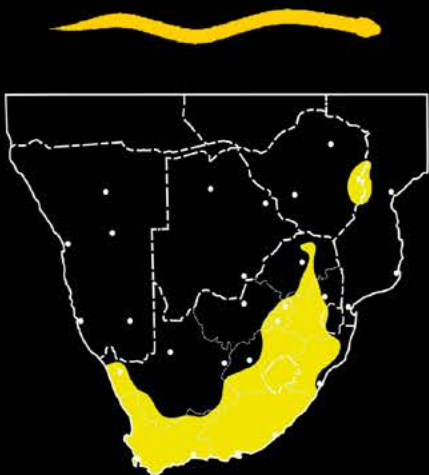


MILDLY VENOMOUS



Cross-marked Grass Snake (*Psammophis crucifer*)

Maximum Length:
82 cm



Other names:

Kruismerk Grasslang

One of the smaller grass snakes averaging 30-50 cm but exceeding 82 cm in length. It is active in the day and feeds on small lizards, especially skinks, as well as frogs. It inhabits lowland forest, moist savanna, montane forest, grassland and fynbos. It is common in the sandy scrub-covered areas of the Cape coast and mountain plateau of Mpumalanga. When disturbed it may roll into a tight coil with the head inside, like the Slug-eater. Most individuals are striped with distinct patterns on the side of the head, but some are plain brown to reddish brown with virtually no markings. A mildly venomous snake that poses no threat to humans.



Graham Alexander



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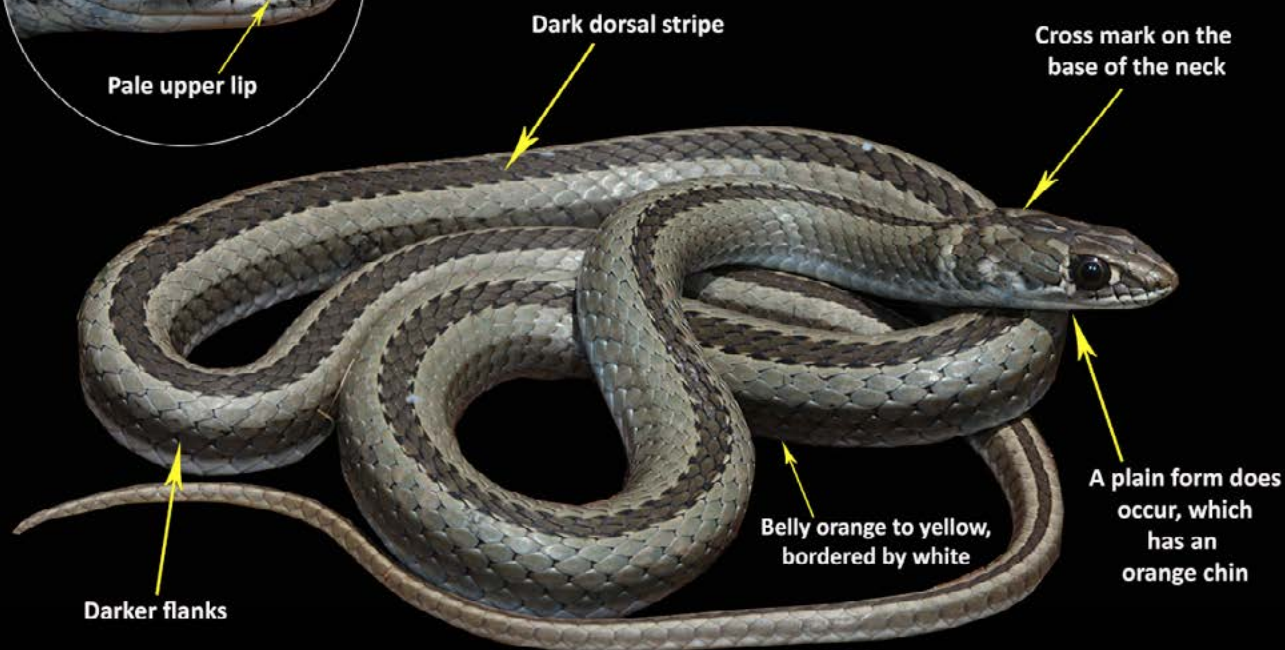
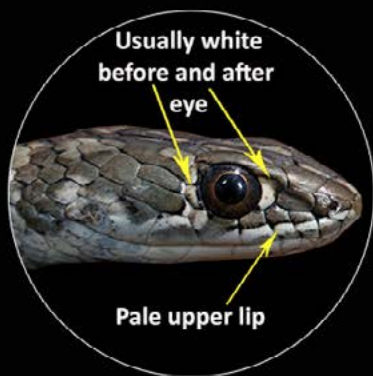
ASI EASY ID

Cross-marked Grass Snake (*Psammophis crucifer*)

MILDLY VENOMOUS

Average length: 40 - 60 cm. Maximum length: 82 cm

Often confused with: other sand and grass snakes



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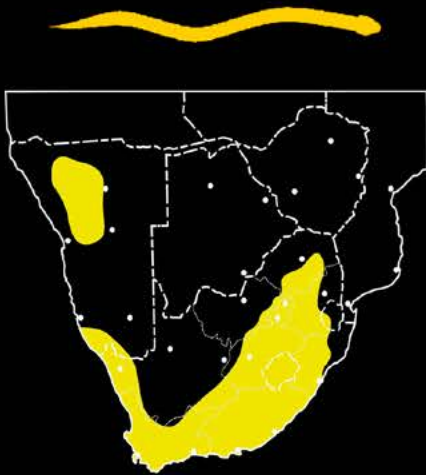


MILDLY VENOMOUS



Spotted Skaapsteker (*Psammophylax rhombeatus*)

Maximum Length:
1.4 m



Other names:

Rhombic Skaapsteker; Gespikkelde Skaapsteker

A fast-moving diurnal snake that inhabits grasslands, fynbos, moist savanna and semi-desert areas. It is a nervous snake and is quick to escape, either into a bush or grass tuft or under a rock. The name 'Skaapsteker' came from the mistaken belief that these abundant snakes accounted for sheep deaths, when the actual culprit was probably the Cape Cobra. This is also one of few African snakes that coil around and protect their eggs – the Southern African Python being the other. The Spotted Skaapsteker feeds on rodents, lizards, birds, frogs and other snakes. The venom of this snake is mild and poses no threat to humans.



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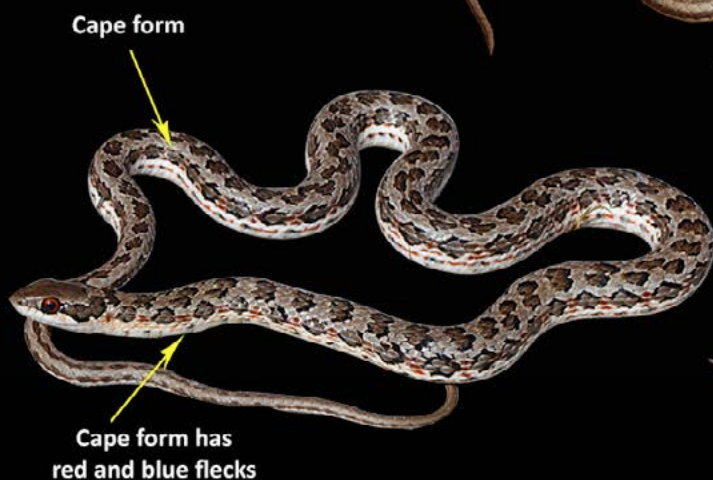
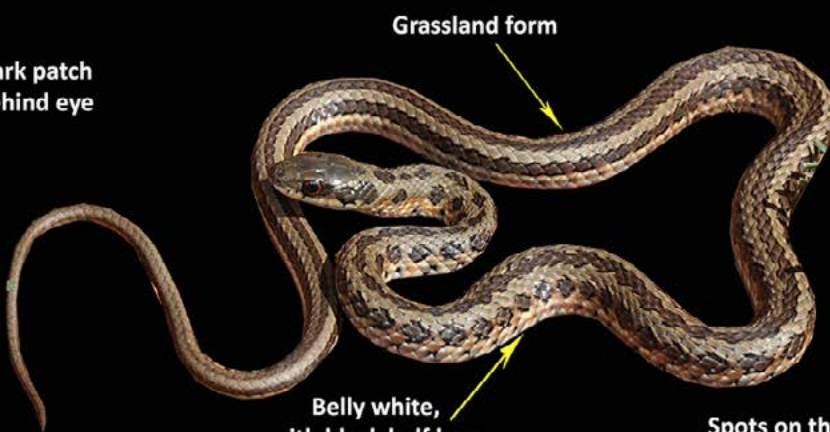
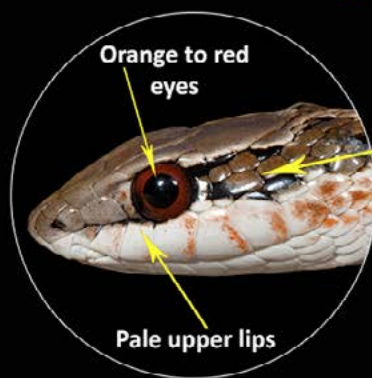
ASI EASY ID

Spotted Skaapsteker (*Psammophylax rhombeatus*)

MILDLY VENOMOUS

Average length: 40 - 60 cm. Maximum length: 1.4 m

Often confused with: other sand and grass snakes and Striped Skaapsteker



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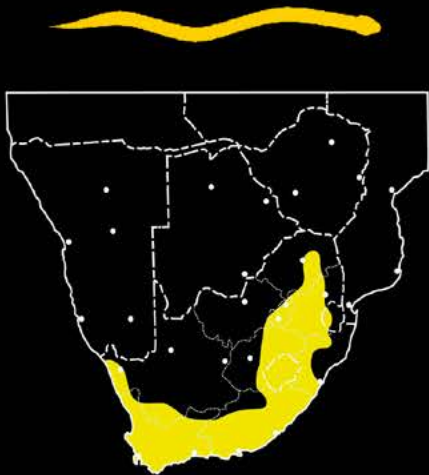


MILDLY VENOMOUS



Spotted Harlequin Snake (*Homoroselaps lacteus*)

Maximum Length:
65 cm



Other names:

Gevlekte Kousbandjie

This colourful little snake averages 30 – 40 cm with a maximum length of 65 cm. It varies greatly in colour, depending on locality, and is found in fynbos, lowland forest, moist savanna and grassland. The Spotted Harlequin Snake is quite common in some areas and is found in deserted termite mounds, under rocks and logs or building debris. When exposed it will wriggle violently to escape. It feeds on legless skinks, blind snakes, other snakes and small lizards. Little is known of the venom of this snake, but bites where the snake has been allowed to chew have resulted in pain, swelling and discoloration as well as painful glands. Swelling subsides within 2-3 days.



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ASI EASY ID

Spotted Harlequin Snake (*Homoroselaps lacteus*)

MILDLY VENOMOUS

Average length: 40 cm. Maximum length: 65 cm

Often confused with: Cape Coral Snakes and Aurora House Snakes



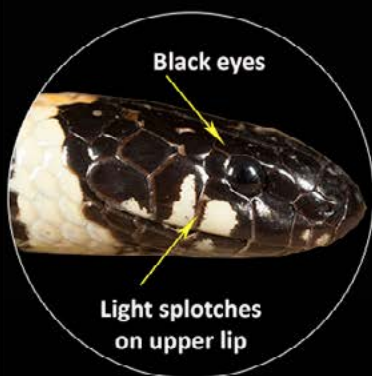
Grassland form usually black
in colour with yellow spots



Yellow to orange central line
of spots down the length of the snake

Striped form has dark
banding on head and neck

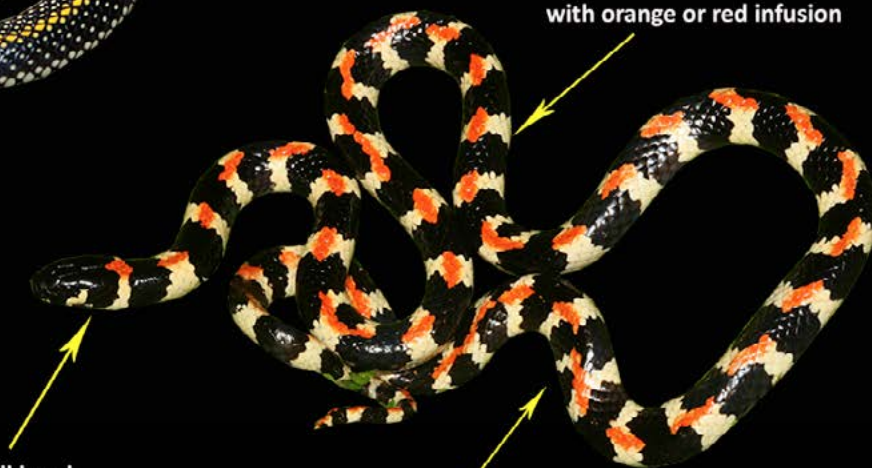
Standard form is a black snake
with yellow transverse bands,
with orange or red infusion



Black eyes

Light splotches
on upper lip

Small head



Dusky yellow belly
with grey infusions

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MILDLY VENOMOUS



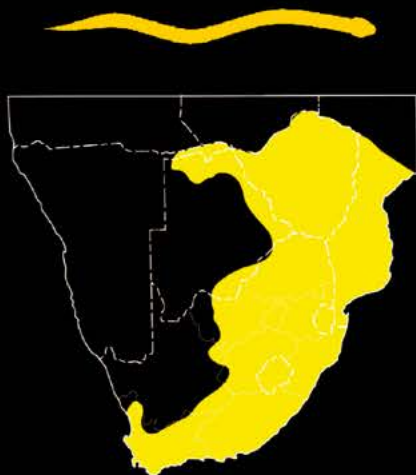
Photo Luke Kemp

Herald Snake

(Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia)

Maximum Length:

1 m



Other names:

Rooilipslang, Red-lipped Snake

A nocturnal snake that frequents suburban gardens, especially those with water features. It is a toad specialist and often eats toads that look far too large to swallow. The Herald Snake is usually greyish to olive-grey in colour, but some individuals are quite dark. The head is always darker than the body and there may be white speckles on the body. In parts of the range the upper lip is bright red, orange or yellowish to white. When threatened, this snake puts up quite a show, drawing the head back into a striking position with the mouth agape and the head flattened. It is mildly venomous and poses no threat to humans or domestic animals.



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ASI EASY ID

Herald Snake (*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*)

MILDLY VENOMOUS

Average length: 40 - 60 cm. Maximum length: 82 cm

Can be confused with: juvenile mambas and cobras



Head is distinctly darker
in colour than body.

Dark temples with
iridescent sheen

Dark temples

Upper lips can be red,
orange or white

Body usually light brown,
grey to olive grey

White speckles down the body

Belly is usually white,
to mother of pearl cream

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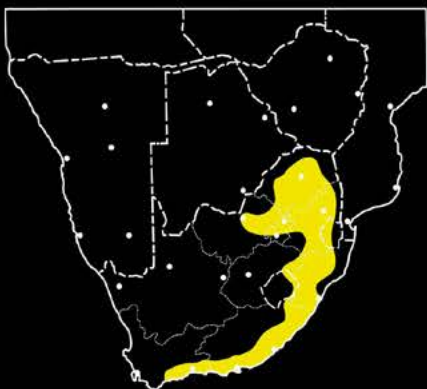


HARMLESS



Western Natal Green Snake (*Philothamnus occidentalis*)

Maximum Length:
1.3 m



Other names:

Westelike Natal Groenslang

A beautiful, bright green snake that is active during the day when it hunts for geckos and frogs. This snake climbs well but is often found on the ground, especially along the banks of well-shaded rivers and streams. It is quick to escape when disturbed and will bite readily if handled but is completely harmless. Because of the green colour it is often mistaken for a Boomslang or Green Mamba and needlessly killed. The Western Natal Green Snake has a whitish belly and may have a bluish tinge and occasionally some darker blotches on the back. It occurs south of Amanzimtoti and inland towards the Drakensberg and further north, as well as into the Eastern Cape and Western Cape to around Swellendam.



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ASI EASY ID

Western Natal Green Snake (*Philothamnus occidentalis*)

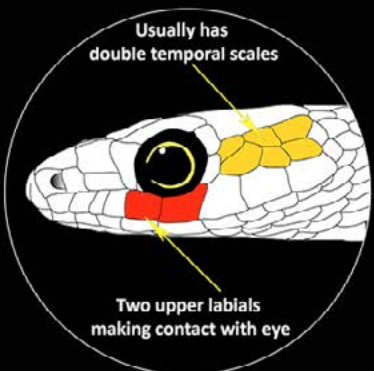
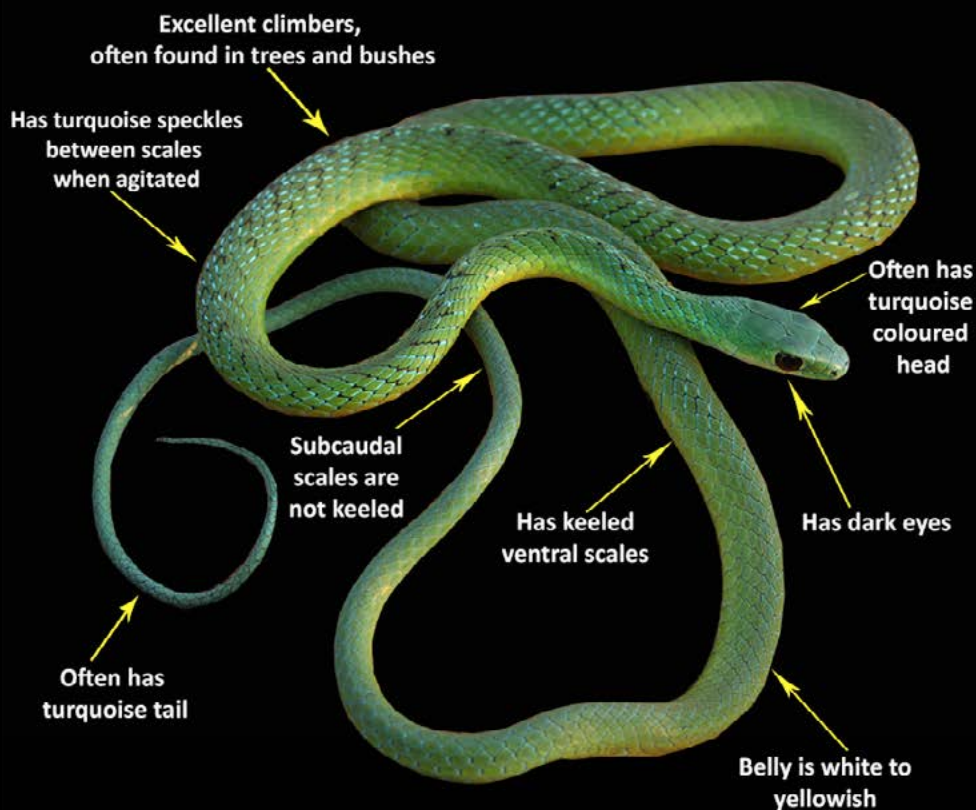
HARMLESS

Average length: 70 cm. Maximum length: 1.3 m

Often confused with: Eastern Natal Green Snakes,
Green Mambas, Boomslang



Distribution is important
to distinguish from the
Eastern Natal Green Snake



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HARMLESS



Green Water Snake (*Philothamnus hoplogaster*)

Maximum Length:
1 m



Other names:

South-eastern Green Snake, Groen Waterslang

A smallish bright green snake that averages 25-40 cm in length with a maximum length of 1 m. It is day-active and favours damp localities such as reed swamps, riverine thickets and flood plains where it feeds mainly on frogs. It also eats fish, small lizards and juveniles reportedly eat grasshoppers. Like the harmless natal green snakes, it is often mistaken for a Green Mamba and needlessly killed. Most individuals are bright emerald, green with a whitish belly and often have a yellow snout. Some individuals, especially further north, have a few blackish bars behind the head. This snake is not venomous and completely harmless to humans.



Juke Kemp



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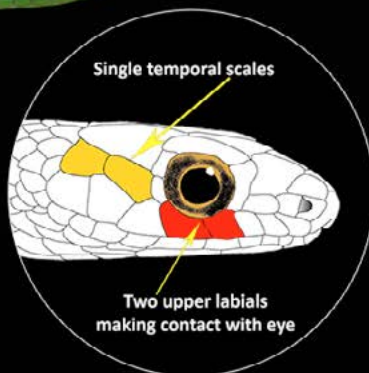
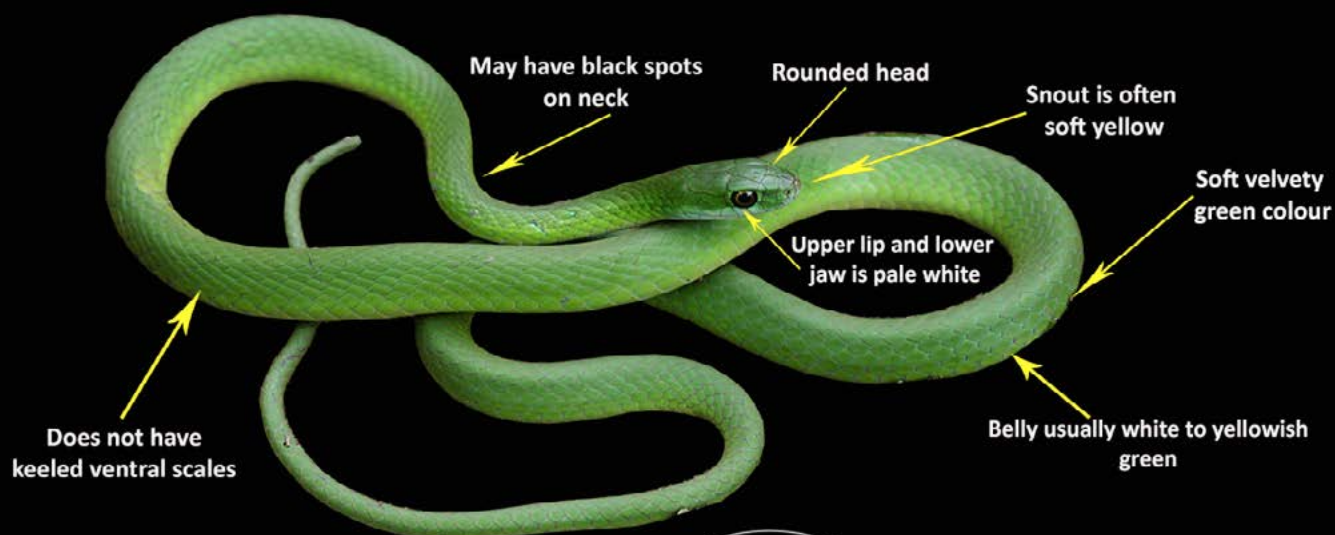
ASI EASY ID

Green Water Snake (*Philothamnus hoplogaster*)

HARMLESS

Average length: 40 - 60 cm. Maximum length: 1 m

Often confused with: Green Mambas, Boomslang,
and the Western and Eastern Natal Green Snakes



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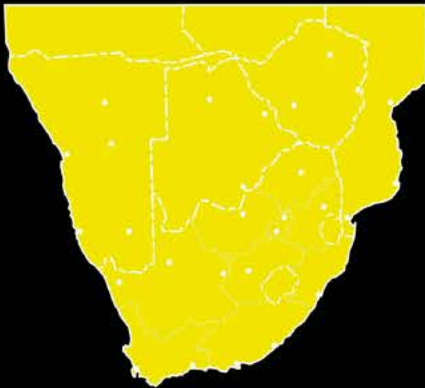
HARMLESS



Brown House Snake

(Boaedon capensis)

Maximum Length:
1.5 m



Other names:

Bruin Huislang

The Brown House Snake, true to its name, frequents human dwellings where it feeds largely on rodents and lizards. It is completely harmless and relies on muscle power to constrict its prey. It is widespread in South Africa and very common in suburban gardens.

This snake is active at night and is relatively slow-moving. Most individuals are medium to dark brown with a mother-of-pearl belly and two light lines on either side of the head – one from the nose through the top of the eye to the back of the head and the other from the back of the eye to the angle of the jaw. The Brown House Snake comes in a variety of shades of brown, often with mottling of white along the neck.



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ASI EASY ID

Brown House Snake (*Boaedon capensis*)

HARMLESS

Average length: 55 cm. Maximum length: 1.5 m

Can be confused with: Slug-eaters



Varies in colour from light brown to reddish brown, chocolate brown, tan and pink

May have mottled markings down the neck

One light line from the nose through the top of the eye to the back of the head

A second light line from the back of the eye to the angle of the jaw

Belly is generally a pearl colour



Note the lines above and below the eye



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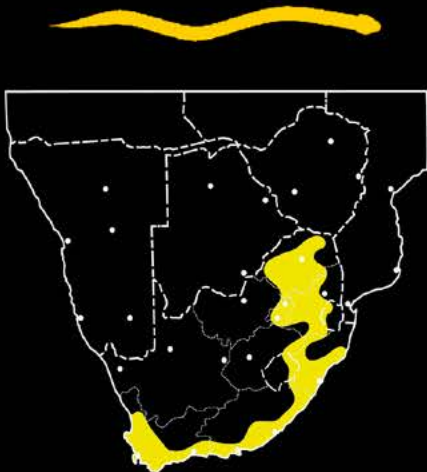
HARMLESS



Olive Snake

(Lycodonomorphus inornatus)

Maximum Length:
1.3 m



Other names:

Olive House/Ground Snake, Olyfslang

A slow-moving nocturnal snake that is quite similar to the Brown House Snake in behaviour. It averages 30-60 cm but reaches 1.3 m in length. Commonly found around houses but prefers damp areas where it hunts for lizards, rodents and other snakes. Because of its colour, varying from olive-green to light brown or black, it is mistaken for a variety of other snakes including the Black Mamba and the Brown Water Snake.

The Olive Snake used to be in the same genus as the house snakes, hence the common name Olive House Snake, but has since been moved to the same genus as the water snakes. This snake is not venomous and poses no threat to humans.



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ASI EASY ID

Olive Snake (*Lycodonomorphus inornatus*)

HARMLESS

Average length: 75 cm. Maximum length: 1.3 m

Often confused with: Brown House Snakes, Brown Water Snakes, Yellow-Bellied House Snakes



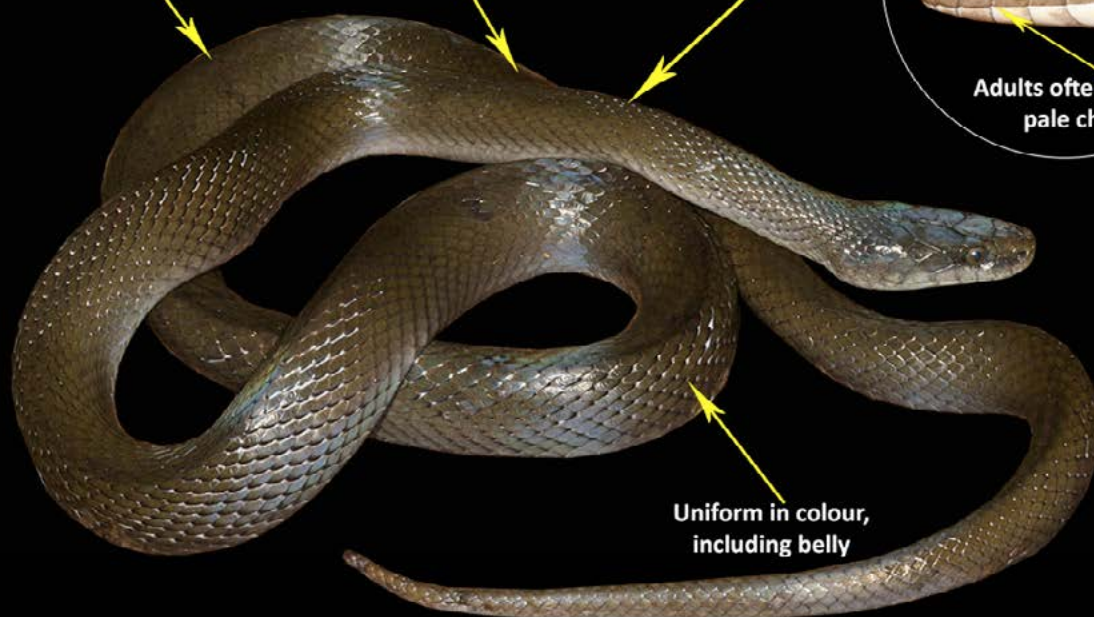
Adults are olive green to brown or black in colour

Juveniles in the Cape are light olive green with distinctly dark head

Juveniles in the East are usually pitch black

Adults often have pale chin

Uniform in colour, including belly



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HARMLESS



Brown Water Snake (*Lycodonomorphus rufulus*)

Maximum Length:
97 cm



Other names:
Bruin Waterslang

A smallish snake averaging 30-50 cm with a maximum length of 97 cm. It is light to dark brown with a salmon-pink to yellow coloured belly. Snakes from the Western Cape are often much darker. This snake is not as aquatic as the Dusky-bellied Water Snake but does frequent rivers, streams, vleis and other damp areas. It is active at night and swims well but is often seen hunting along shaded streams during the day. It is a powerful constrictor and feeds on frogs, tadpoles, fish and occasionally nestling rodents and geckos. Females produce 6 – 23 eggs in summer. Though harmless this snake is much feared in Zulu culture and is called Ivuzamanzi elimdubu.



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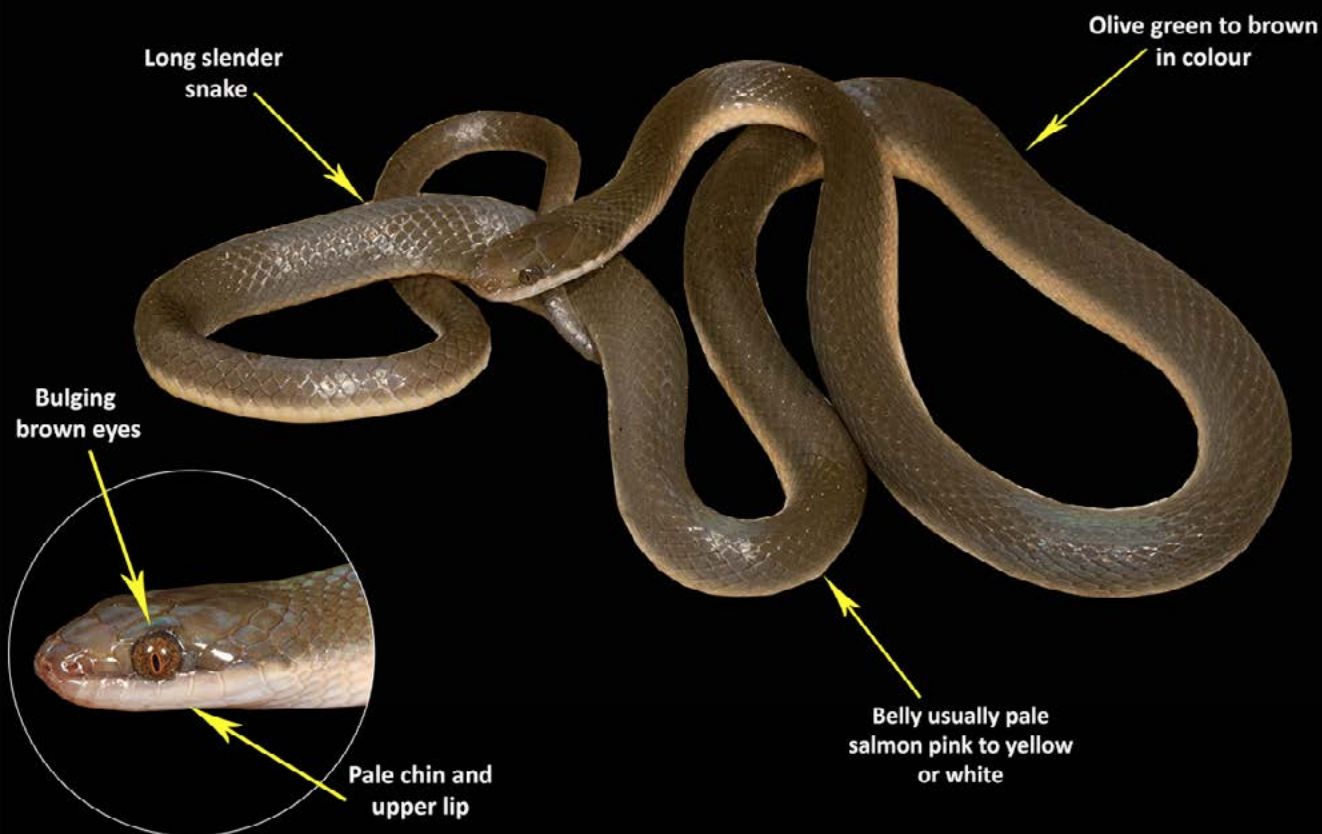
ASI EASY ID

Brown Water Snake (*Lycodonomorphus rufulus*)

HARMLESS

Average length: 45-60 cm. Maximum length: 97 cm

Often confused with: Olive Snakes, Yellow-bellied House Snakes



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HARMLESS



Common Wolf Snake (*Lycophidion capense*)

Maximum Length:
65 cm



Other names:

Cape Wolf Snake, Gewone Wolfslang

This common little snake averages 25-40 cm in length and is frequently found in suburban gardens. It is active at night when it hunts for lizards, especially skinks and geckos. The Common Wolf Snake is fond of damp localities where it seeks refuge under rocks, logs and in rubbish heaps. Though harmless it has long, recurved teeth in both the upper and lower jaw, hence the common name. Females produce 3-9 eggs in early summer. The Common Wolf Snake is difficult to distinguish from the venomous stiletto snake. It differs by having a long thin tail, the head is distinct from the body, and it usually has light spots on the back of each body scale.



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ASI EASY ID

Common Wolf Snake (*Lycophidion capense*)

HARMLESS

Average length: 40 cm. Maximum length: 64 cm

Often confused with: stiletto snakes



Head is distinct
from body

Photo © Luke Kemp

Flattens body
when threatened

Has light spots on the back
of each body scale

Has a long thin tail

Has long recurved teeth
in both the upper and lower jaw,
hence the common name

Belly can be white or black.
Those with white bellies usually
have dark spots on belly

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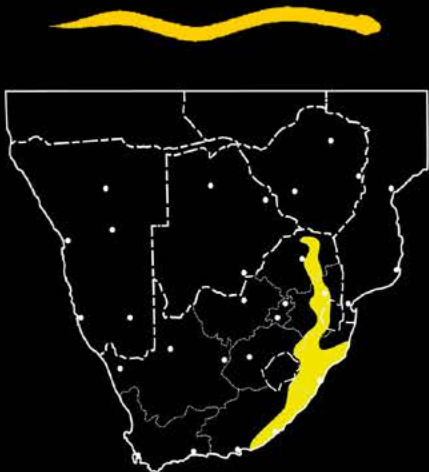


HARMLESS



Brown Egg-eater (*Dasypeltis inornata*)

Maximum Length:
1.2 m



Other names:

Bruin Eiervreter

A harmless egg—eating snake that averages 75 cm but may exceed 1 m in length. It is active at night and is amazingly skilled at finding birds' eggs. These snakes can be problematic for bird breeders as several eggs can be devoured in a single session.

Eggs are swallowed whole, and the shell is cracked by special bony projections in the neck – the contents is swallowed, and the shell is regurgitated in a neat small package.

All of the egg-eating snakes have heavily keeled body scales. If cornered, this snake puts up quite a show, flattening its head exposing the upper lips and will strike quite viciously but lacks teeth.



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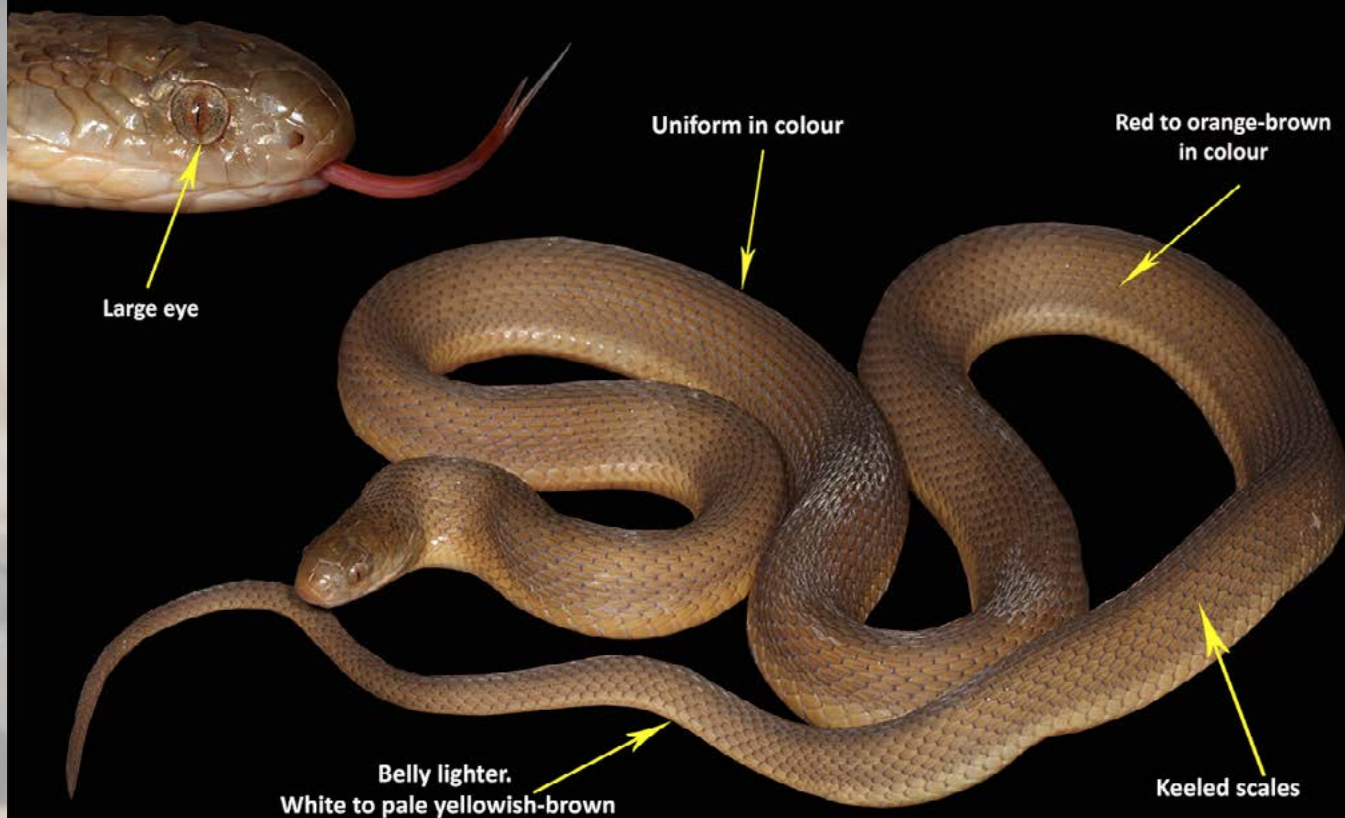
ASI EASY ID

Southern Brown Egg-eater (*Dasypeltis inornata*)

HARMLESS

Average length: 50 - 70 cm. Maximum length: 1.2 m

Often confused with: Brown House Snakes and female Boomslang



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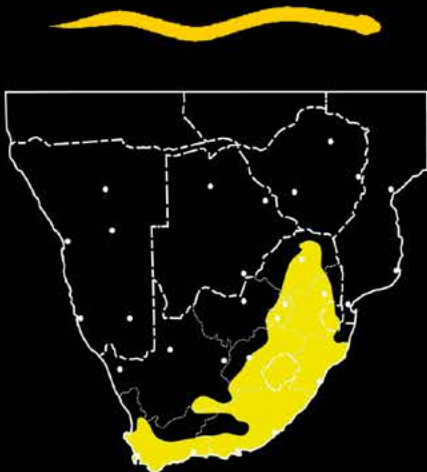


HARMLESS



Common Slug-eater (*Duberria lutrix*)

Maximum Length:
43 cm



Other names:

Gewone Slakvreter, Tabakrolletjie

A small snake that averages 30 – 35 cm. It feeds exclusively on snails and slugs and locates them by following the slime trail. The Common Slug-eater favours damp localities in the south-eastern half of southern Africa.

During the day it seeks shelter under rocks, logs and grass tufts and emerges in the evening to hunt. It is reluctant to bite and if threatened will defecate and secrete a foul-smelling substance simultaneously. It also has the peculiar habit of rolling up into a tight spiral with the head concealed, like a roll of tobacco, hence the Afrikaans name. This small slow-moving snake is not venomous and poses no threat to humans.



Luke Kemp



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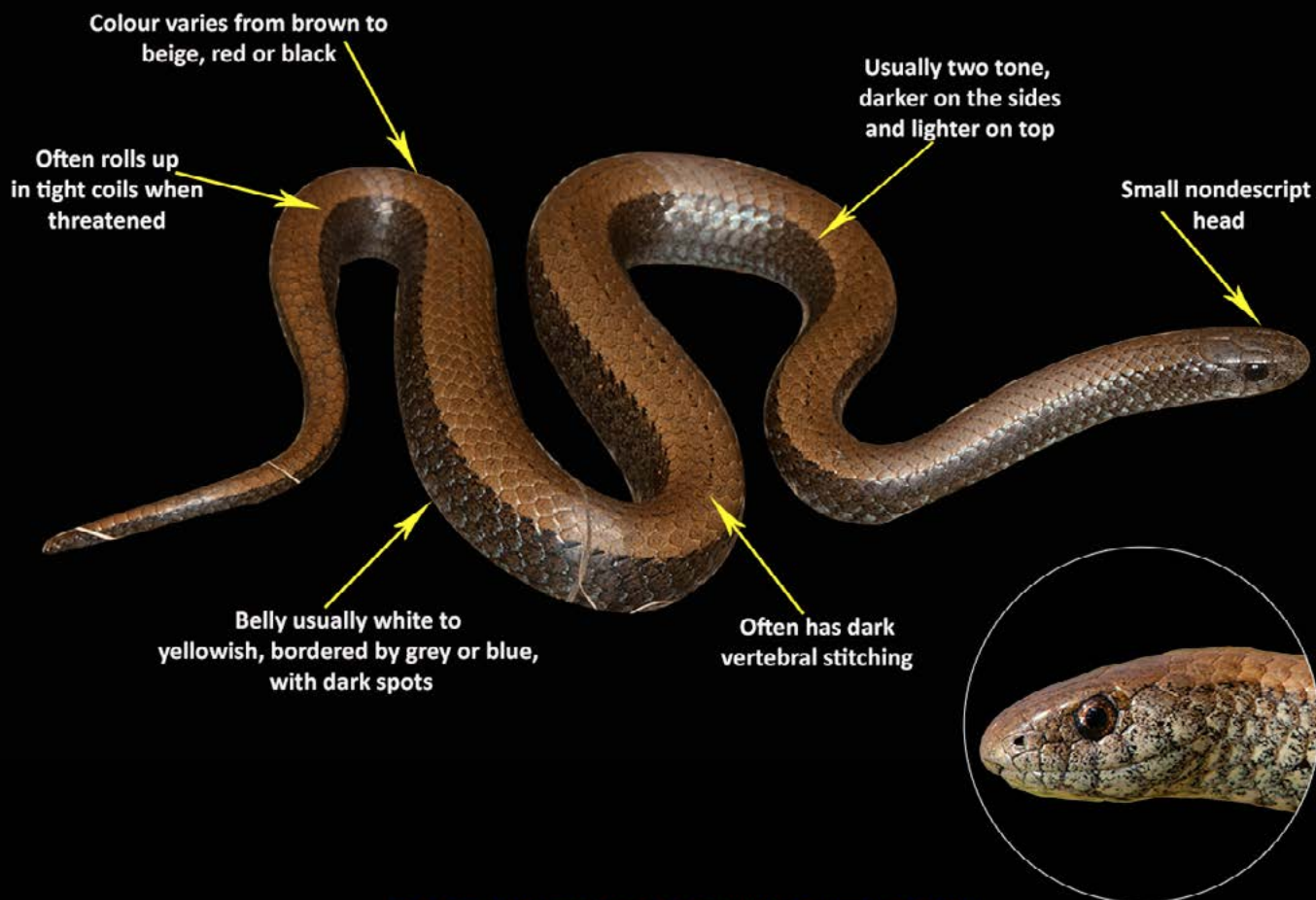
ASI EASY ID

Common Slug-eater (*Duberria lutrix*)

HARMLESS

Average length: 35 cm. Maximum length: 45 cm

Often confused with: Juvenile Cape Cobras



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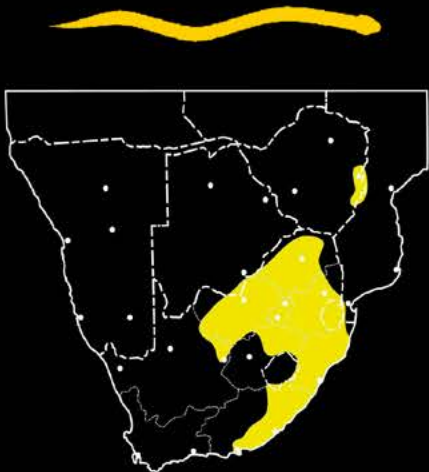


HARMLESS



Bibron's Blind Snake (*Afrotyphlops bibronii*)

Maximum Length:
48.4 cm



Other names:

Bibron's se Blindeslang

This harmless burrowing snake spends most of its life underground where it feeds on ants, termites and their larvae. It is often flushed to the surface after heavy rains. As the common name indicates it is largely blind, with a scale over the eye – an adaptation for an underground existence. Bibron's Blind Snake averages 30 – 38 cm with a maximum length of 48.4 cm. Both ends are rounded, and one must look carefully to work out which end is the head and which is the tail. A variety of burrowing snakes, like the stiletto and harlequin snake prey on this species. This snake may be confused with Delelande's Beaked Blind Snake and the venomous stiletto snakes.



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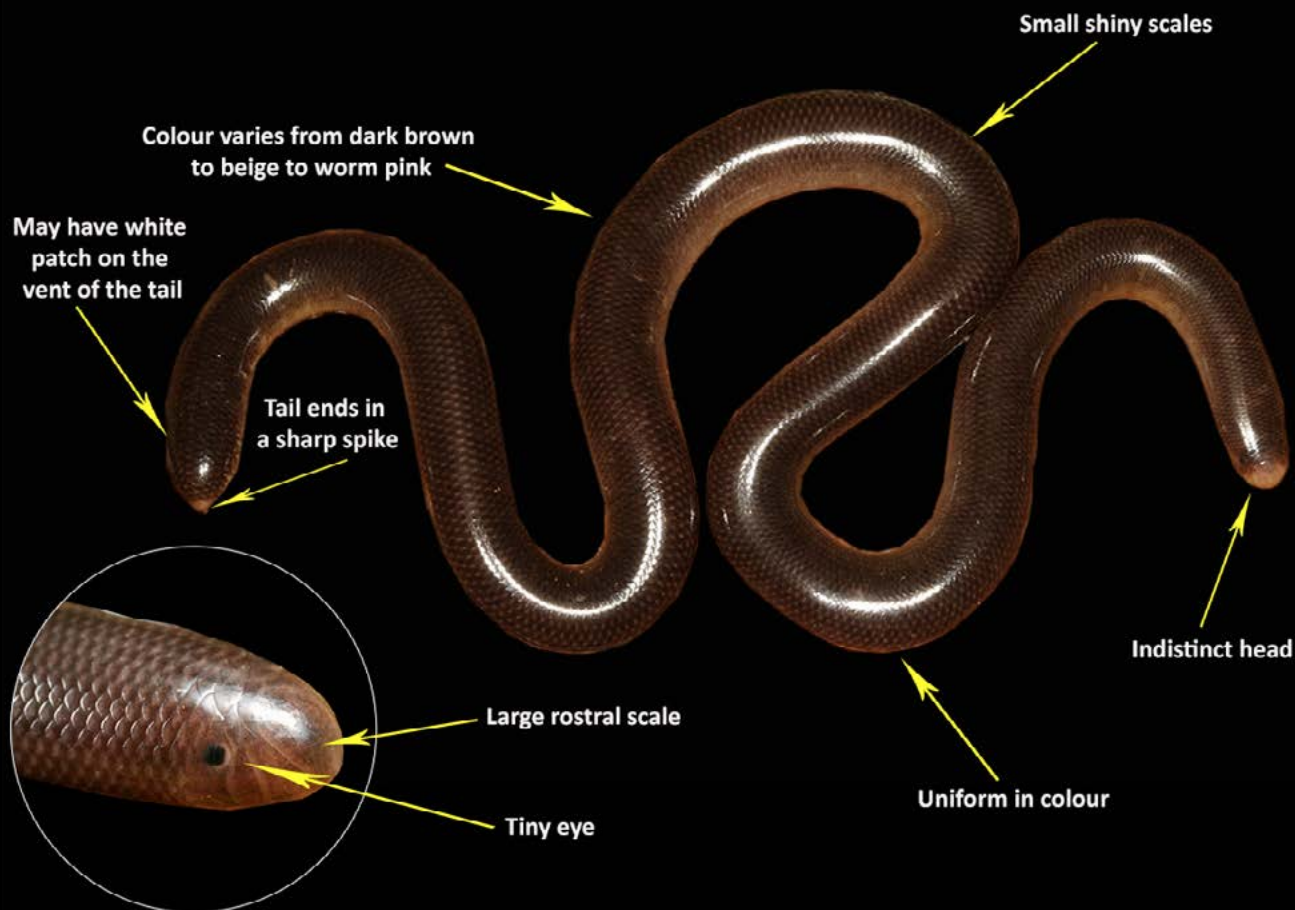
ASI EASY ID

Bibron's Blind Snake (*Afrotyphlops bibronii*)

HARMLESS

Average length: 30-40 cm. Maximum length: 48.4 cm

Often confused with: stiletto snakes and Delelande's Beaked Blind Snakes



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FIRST AID FOR SNAKEBITE



IN THE EVENT OF A SNAKEBITE, DO...

- ✦ Do get the victim to a hospital as soon as possible and in a safe manner. This is by far the most important first aid measure. For medical advice in a snakebite emergency, call the African Snakebite Institute **+27 (0)82 494 2039**.
- ✦ Do keep the victim calm. Often easier said than done as people tend to panic in a snakebite emergency. Many snakebite victims go into shock, experience a drop in blood pressure and may even become nauseous and faint. If possible, do not allow the victim to walk, run, jump etc. Bear in mind that more than 99% of snakebite victims that are hospitalised within a few hours survive their snakebites.
- ✦ Do remove jewellery as well as tight clothing. If bitten on the hand/arm/foot/lower leg, remove rings, bangles, bracelets, watches, anklets and any other tight jewellery including tight clothing.
- ✦ Do administer artificial respiration if patient stops breathing. In serious snakebite cases involving snakes with predominantly neurotoxic venom, like the Black Mamba or Cape Cobra, the victim may soon experience difficulty with breathing, even within 20 minutes. This is a very serious medical condition and assisted breathing could be life-saving. Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation may be beneficial in the short term, but the proper use of a Bag Valve Mask is far better in such an instance.

SPITTING SNAKES

- ✦ The common spitting snakes in South Africa are the Mozambique Spitting Cobra or M'Fezi and the Rinkhals. In the western parts of the country these are replaced by the Black Spitting Cobra. These snakes spray their venom up to a distance of three metres and do so in self-defence to temporarily blind their attacker so that they can make a quick escape.
- ✦ Although spitting snakes accurately aim for the eyes, the venom diffuses into a spray over a wide area and may get onto your hair, face, arms and chest. Venom in the eyes is very painful and must be flushed or diluted as quickly as possible. The production of tears starts this process, but as a first aid measure, flush the eyes with water or a weak (normal) saline solution. The idea is to flush away any excess venom. Transport the victim to a medical doctor, who will examine the eyes for corneal damage and prescribe antibiotic eye drops to prevent secondary infection. There is no reason to use diluted antivenom – it has no proven benefits and may cause an allergic reaction.
- ✦ If treated quickly, the chance of permanent damage to the eyes is extremely remote.

SNAKEBITE EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Netcare Ambulance: 082 911

ER24 Ambulance: 084 124

Provincial Ambulance: 10177/112

African Snakebite Institute: +27 (0)82 494 2039

HOSPITALS AROUND HOWICK

Lenmed Howick Private Hospital

Tel: 033 330 2456
(-29.476910, 30.218773)
107 Main St, Howick, 3290

Umgeni Hospital

Tel: 033 330 2198
(-29.500859, 30.232563)
Main St, Howick, 3290

Life Hilton Private Hospital

Tel: 033 329 5600
(-29.540557, 30.299296)
Monzali Dr &, Hilton Ave, Hilton
Gardens, Hilton, 3245

Greys Hospital

Tel: 033 897 3000
(-29.581129, 30.363009)
The Msunduzi, Town Hill,
Pietermaritzburg, 3201

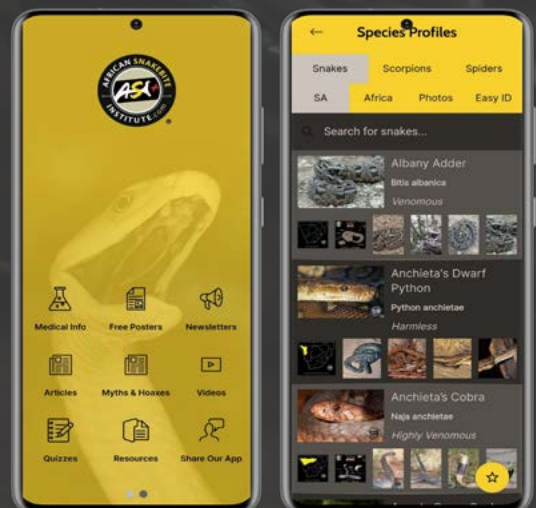
Mediclinic Pietermaritzburg

Tel: 086 177 7002/ 033 845 3971
(-29.608851, 30.389468)
90 Payne Street, Pietermaritzburg,
3201

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The ASI team travels thousands of kilometres a month, often to remote parts of southern Africa, for both snake awareness and venomous snake handling training and for reptile surveys.

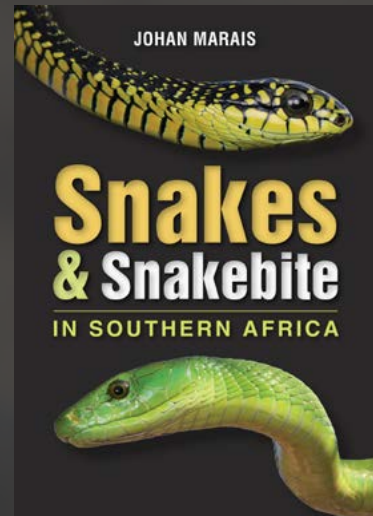
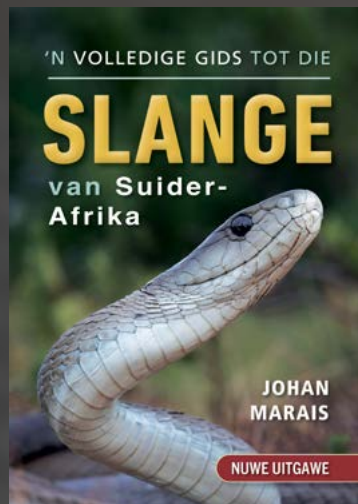
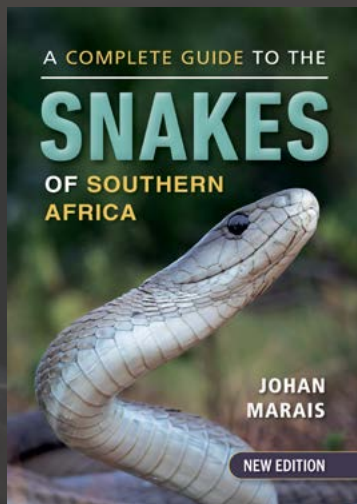
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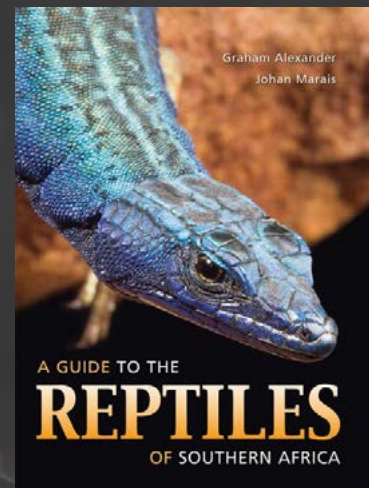
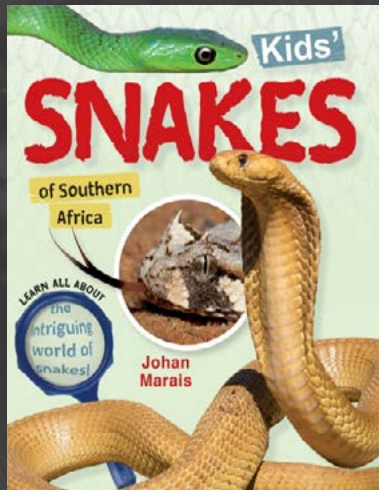
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